

T H E
PRACTICAL PREACHER:

CONSISTING OF

SELECT DISCOURSES

From the Works of the

Most eminent PROTESTANT WRITERS:

WITH

**FORMS of DEVOTION for the Use
of FAMILIES.**

VOL. III.

L O N D O N:

**Printed for T. BECKET and P. A. DEHONDT, at Tully's
Head, in the Strand.**

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S E R M O N I.

The Method of making our good Lives
useful to others.

By Bishop BLACKALL.

MATTH. v. 16.

*Let your light so shine before men, that they
may see your good works, and glorify your Fa-
ther which is in heaven.*

IN the three foregoing verses, our
Saviour had compared his disciples,
first to salt, the chief use of which
is to give a relish to meats, and to
preserve them from corruption; se-
condly, to the sun, the benign influence whereof
infuseth warmth and life into the lower world;
thirdly, to a *city on an hill*, the high situation
whereof is apt to draw mens eyes towards it,
and to put them upon enquiring concerning it;
and, fourthly, to a *lighted candle*, which serves
for no use, if it be *cover'd* with a *busbel*, or
put under a bed; but if it be set (where it

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ought

ought to be) on a candlestick, gives light to them that are in the house, and supplies, in good measure, the want of that greater light; and here in the text he sums up the main design of all the aforementioned similitudes in a brief and plain exhortation (borrowing an easy metaphor from the similitude that was last named:) *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

In discoursing on which words, I intend,

- I. To explain the duty here prescrib'd; and,
- II. To urge some motives to persuade to the practice of it.

I. I am to explain the duty here prescrib'd: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

And I take it that these words do not directly enjoin any single duty, either of piety, justice, or charity; but they rather suppose, that we are already fully instructed in every duty, and careful to discharge all the parts of an holy and virtuous life; and what they teach and prescribe, is, the means and method whereby we may make our constant practice of piety and virtue, as well useful to others, as profitable to ourselves; viz. By so ordering our conversation, that our piety and virtue may become exemplary to others, so that by seeing our good works, they may be incited and encouraged to imitate us therein.

What (I say) the text prescribes, is not this or that particular good work, but a general aim and

and design that we ought to have in every good work that we do, of instructing and bettering others, and gaining glory to God thereby: that we should not satisfy ourselves with barely doing what we are commanded, but should so contrive the doing of our good works, that God may be glorified, and our neighbour edified: that by the same acts and exercises of piety and virtue, by which we endeavour to work out our own salvation, we should also seek to procure and farther the salvation of other men: that our conversation should be not only innocent, but also discreet; not only such as we can justify to our selves, but likewise such as we can justify to the world; not only agreeable to the doctrine of the gospel, but also such as may adorn our holy profession, and be apt to gain profelytes to it. This I take to be the general design and meaning of the precept in the text; *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

But this account of the meaning of the text, tho' it be true, yet is not full and particular enough to direct our practice; because it only shews the aim and design that we ought to have, but does not teach us how we may accomplish the same.

In order therefore to the farther and fuller explication of this general precept, and to render it more readily practicable, I shall reduce it to some particulars, by laying down some rules and directions, which it may reasonably be thought are implied in it, and were meant

by our Saviour to be hereby enjoined, because they are such as seem to be necessary to be observed, in order to the obtaining of that end, which we are here taught to aim at. And,

1. First of all, this precept, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*, plainly supposes that we ought not to affect a solitary, or too much retired life; or (to use our Saviour's own expression in the verse foregoing) that we should not *put our candle under a bushel*, but *on a candlestick*, that it may give light to them that are in the house.

For how is it possible that our piety should quicken others, if they do not see it? Or that our good example should make them better if we hide it from them? If therefore it be our duty to *shine as lights in the world*, and by a holy and exemplary life, to endeavour to bring others to a liking and imitation of the same good course, (which is certainly what our Saviour here meant to enjoin;) it is evident that the way and method to obtain this end, is not to retire from the society of men, and to live alone in a cloister or a desert: this is so very plain, that it can't be needful to add any thing more for the proof of it.

But nevertheless, because some pious and devout persons have spoken and written largely in the commendation of a private and solitary life, as if that were the most perfect and divine way of living; whence also they have appropriated to such as live thus, the name of Religious, as if all that were not shut up in a cloister, or a cell, were prophane and irreligious, or at least

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in a much lower form of godliness, and not near so well employ'd as the others; I think it may not be amiss (for this reason) to enlarge a little upon this subject, and to shew that this solitary and recluse way of living is so far from being more perfect, or more excellent, than the other, that as 'tis an argument of weakness to chuse it, so it is not indeed to be either commended, or even so much as allowed of, in any but such as are weak: for there is no virtue practis'd by those that live reclusely, but what may also be practis'd by such as live and converse in the world; but, on the other side, they who live in towns and cities, and converse freely and friendly with other men, have frequent opportunities of exercising many virtues, which they that live reclusely are, for want of such opportunities, not in a capacity to perform.

He indeed who lives all alone in a cave, or a wilderness, having few of those concernments in the world, about which other men are commonly very busily employ'd, has more time, and greater leisure, for prayer and meditation, and such-like private exercises of religion: but seeing we are born for others, as well as for our selves, and have a duty to perform to our neighbours as well as to God, and are obliged by nature and Christianity to have love for others, and consequently to endeavour to promote their welfare and happiness in this world, and especially to advance, so far as we are able, their spiritual and eternal good; he that chuses a solitary and retired life (even tho' he lives as well, and does as much good, as 'tis possible for a

man to do in that state) yet while he is diligent in one duty, must neglect, in some measure, another, that is altogether as necessary, or rather more so: for we are told in Scripture, that *God will have mercy and not sacrifice*, or mercy rather than sacrifice; and therefore there is no reason why this should be thought a more excellent and perfect way of living than the other.

It is plain that our blessed Saviour, one end of whose coming into the world was to give us an example of holy life, and who was undoubtedly the most perfect pattern of holiness that ever appear'd in the world, did not cloister up himself, or live retired from the rest of the world, except only at some certain times, when he withdrew from company for the freer exercise of his devotions; (and that man is indeed too much in company, who is never alone, and too busy, who can spare no time from his secular employments for prayer and meditation: but I say otherwise, our Saviour) affected not a solitary and unactive life; but *went about doing good*, and conversed freely with other men, and disdained not the company of the worst of men, when he was in hope of doing them good by conversing with them: Insomuch that, you know, he was upon this account slandered by his enemies, as a *friend of publicans and sinners*. And I would to God we were all such friends to them as he really was, that we would make it our endeavour, as he did, *to seek and to save that which is lost*: but such friends we can't be to them, such good we can't do them, if we shun all company, and chuse to live quite

quite alone by ourselves. Our *light* cannot *shine before men*; if we *cover* it, neither can they see our *good works* if we purposely hide them from their sight.

Thus much indeed must be granted, that 'tis very convenient for such as are weak in the faith and not well grounded in their religion; or who, having been before very much corrupted in this wicked world, have newly undertaken a good life, and so are still in great danger of being drawn away to their former evil course, by the persuasion and example of their former wicked companions; ('tis, I say, very convenient and adviseable for such as these) to retire from the world for some time, till they shall have confirm'd their faith by prayer and consideration, till they shall have broken off their bad acquaintance by sufficient absence, till they shall have wean'd themselves from their old and beloved sins by disuse, and till by continual exercising themselves unto godliness, they shall be grown up to some strength and perfection therein: but when they shall have well serv'd these purposes by their retirement, their solitude is no longer to be commended; 'tis time for them then to go abroad, and to do good; and much more good they may then do abroad, than they can do in a reclusive state. And if after this, that they still chuse to continue in their former retirement, the best thing I think that can be said of them is this, they take up with a lower degree of goodness, when they have a fair opportunity put into their hands of attaining to greater perfection; and

that they do not make such improvement of their talent as they might have done: the consequence of which will be, that they will also fall as much short of that great reward which they might have attained.

2. Another rule or direction very requisite to be observed, in order to the obtaining of that end which we are here taught to aim at, *viz.* the glory of God, in the conversion and salvation of men; and which consequently we may reasonably think was meant to be enjoin'd by our Saviour in this precept, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,* is this, that we so contrive the doing of our good works before men, that not only the works themselves may be seen, but the goodness of them may likewise appear.

Now the goodness of any work consists in two things, 1. In the matter of it, when the thing itself is good, when it is agreeable to the law of God, when 'tis a thing that God has commanded to be done: and, 2. In the mind and intention of the doer, when the reason why he does it is because God has commanded it, when he does it out of a principle of obedience to God, and his only, or at least his chief design in the doing it, is to recommend himself to God's gracious acceptance.

Now the first of these, *viz.* Whether the work that we do be materially good, is easy to be known by all that see it: but the second, *viz.* whether we do it with a good design, and out of a right principle, can be known by men (who can judge only by outward appearance)

no farther than we ourselves are pleas'd to discover to them what our design is in it, and what principle we act upon; and therefore that the goodness of our work may be fully seen, it is requisite that our design and principle should (so far as is possible) lie as open to mens views as the action itself.

We ought not therefore to be ever ashamed of owning and professing our religious fear of God, we should not ever be shy of declaring publicly, whenever a proper occasion is offer'd, that conscience towards God is the principle of all our actions; that the reason why we do this or that, or why we do not otherwise, is because we are persuaded that that is a duty, or this a sin; that it is our firm resolution, not willingly to be wanting in any duty, nor knowingly consent to any sin, and that it is this our stedfast resolution of obedience to the will of God, that inflames us in every thing that we do, and not temporal interest, or any other worldly consideration. This is what ought to be, and this is what, if it really be so, we ought not to be ashamed or shy to own, because no action, how good soever in itself, or how publicly soever it be done, is a good example to others, unless it be done, and, if there be a proper occasion, be also own'd to be done upon a right principle, *viz.* a principle of religion.

Thus, for instance, if a man on any public occasion of charity, as suppose in giving to a brief, should give very largely, but at the same time should declare, that the reason why he gave so much was because his neighbours, of
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the same quality and degree with himself had given so; he would not in this act of charity give any example of charity, but only of complaisance or worldly prudence: for in declaring that he gave so much, only because others had given so, he does in effect declare, that if little had been given by others, he would have given less than he did, and that if others had given nothing, neither would he: and if so, 'tis plain his gift was not a fruit or effect of charity, but only an act of neighbourly complaisance; that he did not give what he gave out of pity and compassion to his necessitous brother, but only to avoid the imputation of avarice; that he did not give because he thought it was his duty to give, but because he thought it would have been a discredit to him not to have given as others had done: so that his alms, which consider'd in itself was really a work of charity, yet being given upon these worldly considerations, was not an act of charity in him, nor an example of charity to others.

Or thus, again: if a man that is really sober and temperate out of duty to God, yet does not own that this is his principle, and that the reason why he is always careful to keep himself sober is, because he will not commit a sin; his act of sobriety is no example of sobriety. Nay, on the contrary, if when he refuses to stay longer with those who, he sees, design a drunken bout, he only pretends urgent business as the reason of his leaving them so soon: or, if staying still in their company, he nevertheless stiffly refuses to drink with them to excess, pretending

pretending only weakness, or indisposition of body, as the reason of his refusing his cup; in thus leaving them, or thus refusing to keep the round with them, he is so far from giving to others an example of temperance, that he rather gives them an example of the contrary. For when he only pretends business as the reason of his leaving them, he does as good as say, that if he had not such urgent business to call him away, he would have staid longer with them: and when he pretends only indisposition of body, as the reason of his refusing the cup, he does in effect grant, that if he had not been so indisposed, he would have kept pace with them in their excess; which tacit concession of his affords greater encouragement to them to continue their excess, and to others to follow the same course, than his own personal sobriety, which they have reason to believe is grounded only upon temporal and prudential considerations, does to make them sober out of a principle of conscience: and that sobriety which is not grounded upon a sense of duty, and a fear of offending God, is not the virtue of sobriety, nor properly a good work.

So that if what the man pretends be true, and it be indeed only business, or care of his health, that keeps him sober, his sobriety being apparently no virtue in him, can't be an example of virtue to others. Nay, supposing the contrary, *viz.* that conscience and a fear of offending God, be indeed the true reason of his sobriety, yet while he gives out only those other reasons, tho' his work be manifest, yet the

the whole goodness of it is concealed; and for all that others can learn from his example, is only to mind their business, or to take care of their health, and not the virtue of sobriety, for that he purposely conceals and hides from them, and seems unwilling that they should discover it.

From all which it appears, that those good works only are exemplary, the causes whereof are as visible as the actions themselves; when it is not more manifest that we do the thing that is good, than 'tis that we do it out of a religious principle; and consequently that to the discharge of the precept in the text, the gaining glory to God by the exemplariness of our lives, it is requisite not only that our work be materially good, and that it be done in the sight and presence of others; that they may take example by it; but also that we freely own and declare to the whole world that we do it out of conscience towards God, and not out of any worldly consideration. Following herein the example of the patriarch Joseph, who being earnestly solicited by his mistress to lie with her, thought it not enough barely to resist the temptation, or to give out as the reason of his not consenting (which yet he might have done, and a good reason enough, if there had been no other, it would have been) the danger that there was of his master's discovering their dishonesty, and the great mischief that might thence accrue to both of them; but laid the stress of the business where it ought to be laid: *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*

And

And this is truly to give good example; this is to *Let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, viz.* when we not only do what is good, but also boldly own the religious principle that influences our lives.

And indeed, on the other side, if while we are really the servants of God, we are yet ashamed to appear so, and are unwilling to be thought so by others; and altho' we do the things that God commands, because he commands them, would yet rather have it thought that we do them upon other accounts; as if we reckon'd that it would be a shame, and a disparagement to us to be taken for men of religion and conscience; we may justly fear that our good works will in the event be as unprofitable to ourselves as they are to others, and may reasonably look to be punished for them rather than rewarded: according to that threatening of our Saviour, in Mark viii. 28. *Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.*

3. Another thing requisite to make our piety and virtue exemplary, and to excite and stir up others to an imitation of it (and which consequently may well be understood as a direction meant to be concluded in this general precept, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,*) is this, that we should endeavour all we can by our own prudent carriage and behaviour, to make piety and virtue seem amiable and lovely in the eyes of men. And then

then true virtue and goodness makes the best shew, and appears most amiable, when it is shewn simply, in its own proper shape and colour, without any of that artificial cloathing, wherewith it is commonly dress'd up by hypocrites, and such as pretend to more religion than they really have.

Nay indeed, I believe there is nothing in the world that does more prejudice some men against religion, than that false notion of it, which they happen to have taken up from observing the carriage and behaviour of those hypocritical pretenders to it: for they see that those who make the loudest noise about religion, are very commonly men of sour tempers, of melancholic looks, of severe and grave deportment: that they affect to talk all in scripture-phrases, and to thrust in religious discourse (as we use to say) by head and shoulders; that they are severe censurers of others, and will not allow of a jest, or a smile, or any pleasantness in conversation, as favouring of too great lightness; that they condemn, as unlawful, even the most innocent recreations, and diversions, and seem to judge all that time mispent, which is not employ'd in prayer or reading, or in some such godly exercise: such, I say, they observe is the carriage and behaviour of many of those who make the loudest pretences to religion, and assume to themselves, exclusively of all others, the name of the godly party; and so forming a notion of religion, from thence they become greatly prejudic'd against it. And if this be religion, it is a thing that they can
by

by no means ever like or approve of: for they, it may be, are naturally of a sanguine complexion, and of a chearful temper; and if they can't be religious and chearful too, they had rather be without religion than have their tempers spoil'd by it; or they, it may be, are as yet in the heat of youth, their spirits are light and active, and they have a quick sense of pleasure; and therefore, if they can't be religious without bidding adieu to all mirth and delight, and becoming as grave and serious as old people naturally are, they'll e'en put off all thoughts of religion to that age of gravity and seriousness, which they think is fittest for it, and suits best with it.

But now all this dislike of religion is in truth grounded upon a false and mistaken notion of it; and religion itself is not such a bug-bear as it appeared to them in that hypocritical dress, in which they happened to view it: for a man may be virtuous, and yet pleasant; he may be strictly religious, and yet chearful; he may be truly and thoroughly a good man, and yet appear in dress, in garb, in look, in common discourse and conversation, and the like, just as other men do: he may be a very good christian, and yet not cease to be a good companion; and, in fine, he may, even in his youth, put on all the gravity of a christian, and yet not put on that sourness and moroseness which is oftentimes the infirmity of old age. For true religion does not consist in a peculiar garb, in an affected phrase, in a singular behaviour, in a down look, in sighing and sobbing, and a
whining

whining tone, and such like fooleries, but in the rational and manly worship of the true God, and in an hearty love and good-will to men. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* And in all this, there is nothing that men can dislike, I am sure there is nothing therein that they can despise.

If therefore we would have our *Light so shine before men*, that they seeing our *good works*, may be incited to imitate our example: if we would gain proselytes to virtue and religion, we should not (at least not in our public behaviour) affect needless austerities; we should take care that religion do not (as it does in a great many) sour our tempers, and make us peevish, froward and ill-natur'd; we should be as complaisant to others as we can be with a good conscience, and endeavour to please all men, as far as we can do it without offending God. We should rather sometimes take part with others in their innocent sports and recreations, (tho' to do so be against our own inclination) than, by our studiously and constantly avoiding the same, give them occasion to think that religion condemns all sport and recreation. We should rather sometimes even force ourselves to mirth and pleasantness (altho' our own temper be naturally grave and melancholic) than give them occasion to think, that our melancholy is the effect of our religion; and that a man can't be religious and chearful too.

Thus,

Thus, I say, we should endeavour (as St. Paul exhort) to *please every man his brother, for his good, to his edification*: we should endeavour all ways as well by our example, as discourse, to represent religion under the most lovely character; we should carefully avoid giving any occasion to men to think, that they can't be truly religious without bidding adieu to all the delights and pleasures of this life; or that they can't be the faithful servants of God, without rendring themselves justly ridiculous to the world for their humorsome and fantastical singularity. Thus, I say, we should endeavour both by our discourse, and by our own wise conversation, to beget a true and lovely notion of religion in men's minds; this is the way to adorn our profession, this is the likeliest means we can use to induce other men to embrace it.

For when men shall see that they may be both merry and wise, that they may be truly religious, and yet not be always talking of religion; that they may be strictly conscientious, and yet not nicely scrupulous; that they may be in every respect good men, and yet not be ridiculous for their preciseness; and, in a word, that they may have their conversation in heaven, and yet not be unfit for conversation upon earth; it may reasonably be hoped, that such a fair representation of religion as this will induce a great many to become profelytes to it, and that *seeing our good works*, they will be persuaded to become followers of the same.

In order to which it is farther requisite, (and therefore this may be laid down as another rule or direction meant to be prescribed in this general precept, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works.*;) It is farther requisite, I say,

4. That with a general care to order our whole conversation aright, so as not to give ill example in any thing, we should have a special regard to those duties of religion which are of a public nature, and proper to be perform'd in the sight and presence of other men, and that we be strictly regular and constant in the performance of them.

Such especially is the public worship of God, in those times, and at those places, which are appointed for it; which therefore can't at proper opportunities be neglected, or without reasonable excuse omitted, without breach of the precept in the text, commanding us to *let our light shine before men.* *Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works,* says the author to the Hebrews, chap. x. 24. which precept is in sense and effect the same with this in the text, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works;* and then he adds immediately, as one special instance of this duty, the duly frequenting the public assemblies, for the worship of God; *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.*

And this they should do well to consider seriously of, who upon any trifling occasion, and many times upon no occasion at all, do keep from church.

For

For tho' they should use all the same prayers at home, or in their closets, that are used in the church, and tho' they should read at home the very same portions of scripture that are read there, and tho' they should pass all the rest of the church-time at home in the reading of some good book, treating perhaps of the very same subject that is treated of by the minister in the church (and yet I fear there are but few of those that make a custom of staying from church, who do ordinarily spend the church-time at home so well as this; but, I say, if they should always employ themselves thus at their homes in the hours of public worship,) yet this however would not be quite so well as if they had been then at church. For, even supposing, that by thus employing themselves at home in the church-time, they might edify themselves as much as they might have done at church (which yet is not true) it is plain however that they do not thereby so much edify their neighbours: they may get a great deal of good to themselves by these private exercises of religion, but they do no good at all thereby to others: their prayers, and their reading, may profit themselves much, but their example cannot profit the world; their *candle*, tho' it burns clear, and shines bright, yet being *bid* thus *under a bushel*, when it ought to have been set on a *candlestick*, gives no light to their neighbours. So that in doing for substance all the same things at home, which should have been done at church, they perform but only half their duty, being at the same time manifestly defi-

cient in that other half which is here enjoind, making *their light so shine before men, that others seeing their good works, may glorify their Father which is in heaven.*

5. Lastly, As there are some duties of our religion of a public nature, and which therefore are not at all exemplary unless they be done in public; so there are others which have a peculiar aptness to procure love and esteem to them that practise them, and in consequence to procure a liking and esteem also to that religion which teaches and enjoins them: in order therefore to the attaining of that end which we are here directed to aim at, *viz.* the gaining glory to God by the exemplariness of our lives, it is more especially requisite, that we give our minds to the study and exercise of these virtues.

But it would take up too much time now to enquire what these virtues are, and to shew how much our religion is adorned and credited, and commended thereby; and therefore I shall defer the handling of this head, with what else remains, to another opportunity.

S E R M O N II.

The Method of making our good Lives
useful to others; and the Motives
to it.

By Bishop BLACKALL.

MATTH. v. 16.

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may
see your good works, and glorify your Father
which is in heaven.*

THESE words (as I have already noted)
contain the practical inference or con-
clusion, which our Saviour draws from the
three foregoing verses, wherein he had com-
pared his disciples to salt, to the sun; to a *city*
on an hill, and to a *lighted candle*; and espe-
cially from the last verse of these three, wherein
having noted the incongruity of covering a
candle with a *busbel*, and the usefulness thereof
when set on a candlestick, he here, borrowing
a metaphor from that similitude, infers a duty
incumbent on all his disciples, *viz.* to be of

the like use to the rest of the world, by the exemplariness of their lives, that a *candle* set on a *candlestick* is to those that dwell in the house; *Let your light, &c.*

In discoursing on which words I proposed to do these two things:

- I. To explain the duty here prescribed: And,
- II. To urge some motives to persuade to the practice of it.

I. To explain the duty here prescribed; and this I proposed to do by reducing this general precept, to some more particular rules and directions; such as it may reasonably be thought were meant by our Saviour to be hereby enjoin'd, because they are such as seem necessary to be observ'd, in order to the attaining of that end which we are here taught to aim at.

And four of these directions I have already mentioned, and treated of, *viz.*

1. That we should not affect a solitary, and too much retired life; to do so is truly to *put the candle under a bushel*.
2. That we should be always free in owning the religious principle that influences our lives; that so not only the works themselves that we do, but also the goodness of them may appear.
3. That we should endeavour by our own prudent carriage and behaviour, and particularly by avoiding all needless austerities and affected singularities, to beget in mens minds such a notion of religion, as may not be scaring and discouraging to them, such as may make it

it appear to them (as indeed true religion is) manly, and rational, and worthy of their choice. And,

4. That we should be especially strictly regular and constant in the performance of all those duties of religion which are of a public nature, and are proper to be perform'd in the sight and presence of others.

I add now in the fifth and last place,

5. That there being some duties of our holy religion, which have a special aptness to procure love and esteem to them that practise them, and by consequence to procure also a good liking to that religion which teaches and enjoins them, this precept of our Saviour, commanding us to let our *light shine before men*, may reasonably be understood as meaning to enjoin a particular care, and a more than ordinary strictness and constancy in the discharge of all such duties.

And to this purpose is that exhortation of the apostle in Phil. iv. 8. *Whatsoever things are true*, that is, evidently and undeniably good; *Whatsoever things are honest*, that is, decent, comely or venerable; *Whatsoever things are just*, that is, manifestly reasonable, fair or equitable; *Whatsoever things are pure*, that is, cleanly and graceful, and for that reason delightful to the beholders; *Whatsoever things are lovely*, that is, apt and likely to render a man beloved by his neighbours, and well accepted to those among whom he lives; *Whatsoever things are of good report*, that is, are generally well spoken of, and apt to procure the good word of others;

If there be any virtue, that is, any practice, the goodness whereof is so clearly evident by the light of nature, as to be readily acknowledg'd by all; *and if there be any praise*, that is, any practice that is universally esteem'd laudable and praise-worthy; *think on these things*, that is, let your thoughts be chiefly fix'd upon, and your endeavours chiefly bent to these; give your minds to the study and exercise of these virtues above all others.

And the reason of this advice is plain, *viz.* because tho' there is indeed no virtue, or good work, of any kind that may be neglected without sin, yet other virtues are necessary only as duties, that are necessary to be done, only because we can't discharge a good conscience towards God, while we are failing in them; but these, these lovely, these honourable virtues, these works of good report, these virtues and graces which attract esteem, and procure veneration and respect; these, I say, are necessary, not only as duties to which we are directly obliged by those particular precepts which enjoin them; but likewise as ornaments and graces to our profession, as serving to beget in others a liking to our religion, as a good means to help to spread and propagate it in the world, and to make profelytes to it. By these we do not only exercise that religion which we profess, but we commend and adorn it: according to that exhortation of the same apostle in Tit. ii. 10. *to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*

And

And it may be consider'd, that that exhortation is there especially given to servants, that is, to persons of the lowest rank, and meanest condition: now certainly if it was the duty even of these to endeavour to *adorn* that holy religion which they profess'd, it is much rather the duty of those who are of better fashion and superior degree, to do the same; that is of masters of families, of great men, of magistrates, of all that are advanc'd high in dignity above others, or have power and authority over others: such as these are more especially oblig'd to adorn the religion which they profess, because they are of all others in the best capacity of doing it, because their examples lie most open to be taken notice of, and are most likely to have an influence upon others.

It is therefore plainly the duty of all christians; for if it be even of the lowest (as the apostle there expressly teaches) much rather is it so of those who are in an higher station, to *adorn* the *doctrine* of Christ, that is, by the beauty and orderliness of their lives, to endeavour to make that religion which they are govern'd by, appear worthy of all acceptance, and thereby to prepossess men in its favour; that so they may hear, with an inclination and desire to be convinc'd (or at least without any prejudice) those arguments that are offer'd for the proof of it; which if they do, they can't fail to be convinced by them.

And therefore there being (as was said) some christian virtues and graces, which have a peculiar beauty and comeliness, which approve themselves

themselves to every man's conscience, which as being amiable even at the first sight, and universally praised and spoken well of, have a special aptness to beget a liking and esteem; and a sort of prejudice for that religion which enjoins the practice of them, it is plainly our duty (and a duty which the precept in the text commanding us to make our *light shine before men*, meant to lay upon us) to have, in the course of our lives, a particular regard to these virtues, and a special care not to be deficient therein: and of this kind are these four which follow; I don't mean these only (for there is a beauty and gracefulness in every christian virtue) but I mean these more especially, *viz.* temperance, justice, meekness, and charity.

1. Temperance, or moderation in the use of meats and drinks. This is not only a necessary duty of christianity, but it is also plainly an ornamental virtue; it renders lovely and beautiful the person that is endued with it; it makes him respected and reverenc'd by all that know him: for a man that eats and drinks only for necessity, to repair the daily decays of his body, not to please his palate, not to satisfy the cravings of a luxuriant and extravagant appetite, lives as becomes a man, and upholds the dignity of his nature, and maintains that dominion which the rational part of him, his soul, ought to have over the brutish part of him, his body. Hence, when we would give a good character of any person in one word, we often do it by this, we say he is a very sober man, and in saying this of him; we think we say enough to recommend

recommend him to the esteem and respect of all : for if he be a sober man, he is one that has his wits and his reason always about him : he is therefore fit to be employ'd in any business he is capable of, and will not fail the expectation of those that employ him ; whereas an intemperate person, who is a slave to his palate, and drinks away his reason, turns a wise man into a fool, and a man into a beast ; and is therefore more vile and despicable than other fools, and than other beasts, because his folly or want of reason is the effect of his own vicious choice, whereas theirs was the lot of their creation.

Such is the natural turpitude of the sins of intemperance, that even they that do too freely allow themselves therein, yet cannot hardly but be sensible that their way of life is a reproach and a discredit to them ; and therefore very rarely (unless they are harden'd in their wickedness, and past all shame) do they care that the world shou'd know what sort of men they are. *They that be drunken are drunken in the night*, says the apostle. And if upon any occasion a character were to be given of them, they would take it heinously ill of him, who should make (tho' very truly) their drunkenness a part of their character.

But a part of their character it must be, if it be true ; because 'tis what with all their care and endeavour they can't conceal from the knowledge of the world : and that's another reason why it should be thought, that by this precept, commanding us to be good examples to others, we are more especially oblig'd to the practice of temperance,

temperance, viz. because the vices of intemperance are, of all others, most manifestly contrary to good example, upon this account, because they can't be hid; because the natural effects of them, which are evident to all, I mean that sottishness, that stupidity, that ridiculous folly and childishness, which they introduce, plainly discover to all the cause by which they are produced: so that how close and secret soever the man might be in the act of intemperance, it is nevertheless as public as if it had been acted in all those streets which he afterwards passes thro', or in all those companies which he afterwards happens to be in; for his sottish look, his wry walk, his trembling hand, his ridiculous and antick behaviour, his faltering or broken speech, his profane, obscene or foolish talk, every thing that he says, tells, and every thing that he does, shews the world where he has been, and how he has been employ'd. So that a man can't be intemperate, especially in drinking, but he must be scandalously so; and what is commonly said of him, (unless he be one that is quarrelsome in his drink) that he is no body's foe but his own, is most evidently false, for he hurts every body that knows him, or converses with him; at least, there is great danger that they may be infected by his ill example: and by the scandalousness of his behaviour he also brings a reproach and disparagement upon the holy religion which he professes.

2. Another very graceful and adorning virtue, the practice whereof is apt to render a man beloved

beloved and respected by all those among whom he lives, and by consequence to beget also in others a good liking to, and a high esteem for, that religion by which he is influenc'd and governed, is justice; exact justice and honesty in all our dealings, and faithfulness in discharging all our trusts. And therefore in the place already cited, Tit. ii. 10. where christian servants are exhorted to grace their profession, this way of their doing it is particularly mentioned. *Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*

In order therefore to the obtaining that end, which in the text all christians are requir'd to aim at, that is, that we may gain glory to God, by making the *light* of our good example to *shine before men*, there is plainly nothing more needful than this, that we be square and exact in all our dealings, punctual in the performance of all our promises, and faithful in the execution of all our trusts.

For whatever opinion or persuasion men are of in the speculative points of religion, justice and truth, fidelity, and fair dealing, are what all people like, approve and commend, at least in others; and even they who for filthy lucre's sake allow themselves in the practice of fraud and falshood, yet dare not offer to justify their own practice; they may find their injustice gainful, but they can't think it reputable: what they chiefly trust to is their cunning, by which they hope they may so contrive their doing of wrong, as not to be found out; but if it should
be

be discovered, they are sensible it must bring upon them an indelible reproach.

There being therefore a great many religions, and sects of religion in the world; and the greatest part of mankind being not in a capacity, or not having leisure enough to examine into the several grounds of each of them, there is plainly nothing that can more recommend any religion to the general good liking of such as are ignorant of the grounds and reasons of it, than the remarkable justice, truth, and fidelity of those that profess it: for these social virtues being commendable among all, and of daily use, if there be any one sort or sect of religious professors that is remarkable above the rest for the constant exercise of them; all indifferent and discreet persons will, for this reason only, have a better opinion of them than of the rest; and will be readily inclin'd to think, that theirs is the best religion, because it makes them honest men than the rest are.

And this, without doubt, was one great help towards the spreading of christianity in the world so very fast as it did spread at the first preaching of the gospel. It was then seen and observ'd by all, that as many as gave up their names to Christ, tho' they had been before thieves and covetous, unjust and extortioners, did immediately upon their embracing Christianity, become quite other men; so that it could not be doubted but that this change in their manner of life was wrought by the power of that religion which they had newly embraced; and the observation of this quickly begat in such

as

as were well disposed, a general good liking to the religion, even before they had been instructed in the grounds and reasons of it, and inclined them to give a ready ear to the proofs that were offered of its truth and divinity; and these being very strong and convincing, all that heard them without prejudice were quickly persuaded by them.

But the arguments for the truth of the Christian religion are the same now as formerly, and as strong now as ever, and yet now we see they prevail little or nothing; very few converts to Christianity are now ever heard of: for which, I believe, a better reason can hardly be given than this, That tho' Christianity be the same excellent religion that it was then, the lives and manners of Christians now-a-days are not so excellent as they were formerly; so that (to keep to the point I am now speaking of) tho' there has been in these last ages, by reason of the great increase of trade and navigation, a much better opportunity of spreading Christianity into the remote parts of the world, than ever there was heretofore; yet this opportunity has rather hinder'd the growth of Christianity, than promoted it; and all for want of that truth and fidelity, and that just and fair dealing in trade, which our religion indeed strictly enjoins, but few that outwardly profess Christianity, do now make much conscience to practise. For how is it likely that a Turk, a Heathen, or an Indian, should have any inclination to turn Christian, when he sees (and, I fear, 'tis a thing too often to be seen) that those Christians with whom he trades,

trades, are not so fair in their bargains, so true in their assertions, so faithful to their promises, and so square and honest in their dealings, as many even of the Infidels themselves are? What reasonable inducement can he have to lend a willing ear to those arguments whereby the Christian would persuade him to embrace Christianity, when, as he may well think (judging of the nature of the religion from the manners of those that profess it) he can't embrace it without renouncing those principles of moral justice and honesty, which were taught him by the light of nature only?

This therefore is a matter that highly concerns us all (tho' indeed more especially those that travel into foreign parts, or have any traffic or dealings with men of other religions) to take special care of, *viz.* That we do not by any falshood or injustice in our dealings with them, prejudice them against our religion, or give them occasion to blaspheme it.

But let us revive that truth and justice, that honesty and fidelity, that uprightness and singleness of heart, which the Christians in the primitive times were such eminent examples of; and then we may hope to see now a more speedy and general conversion of men to our most holy faith, than ever there has been in former ages; then may we look for a quick and punctual accomplishment of those many ancient prophecies in the Old Testament, as well as New, concerning the enlargement of the kingdom of Christ, upon which we ground a hope, that there will be yet, before the end
of

of the world, a general conversion of all nations to the Christian religion.

3. Another Christian grace or virtue, highly ornamental to all that are endued with it, is meekness or humility, together with all the branches and expressions, all the fruits and effects thereof; every one of which is lovely and amiable, and apt to endear, and render beloved and respected, the person in whom they are observ'd; such are, gentleness, good temper, easiness of access, affability in discourse, courteous behaviour, a readiness to do kindness, contentedness in our condition, orderliness in our station, and the like.

These branches and fruits of humility of mind and carriage, are every one of them exceedingly taking, and very apt to procure love and esteem; they are all of general good report; they are commended and spoken well of by all; so that there can be nothing more proper to recommend our holy religion to mens esteem, than the careful practice and exercise of these virtues: for even they who know nothing of the grounds and reasons of our religion, yet can't but see and acknowledge, that it is a religion worthy of God, when they observe how much it does adorn and beautify the lives of those that are influenc'd by it; when they take notice how orderly and useful it makes them in every state and condition of life that they are in; and a general liking of our religion, and a good inclination towards it, must render them much more easy to be persuaded of its truth.

And accordingly we may observe, that there is not any motive whereby, in the sacred writings, we are more frequently exhorted to the practice and exercise of these virtues of humility, than we are by the consideration of that love and esteem that they will gain to us, and that credit and reputation which they will, in consequence, procure to our religion.

Thus in 1 Pet. v. 5. we are exhorted in general to *be clothed with humility*; by which expression 'tis intimated, that humility does adorn and set us off in the eyes of men, more than any dress or apparel can do. And the same thing is again intimated in the third chapter of that epistle, at the 3d and 4th verses, where the apostle, reproving the vanity of women in affecting to set themselves off by a fine dress, hath these words: *Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.—For after this manner in old time the holy women adorned themselves.* And this same advice is also given them by St. Paul, in 1 Tim. ii. 9. *Let women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety.* In all which places, modesty and humility, and the lovely fruits of these graces in the outward behaviour, are recommended as the best ornaments to set ourselves off in the eye of the world, and to gain to ourselves universal love and respect.

And

And what love and respect we gain to ourselves by these virtues, we do, by consequence, also gain to our religion: for the same things for which we ourselves are commended and belov'd, our religion, which has this good influence upon our behaviour, will likewise be approved, and well spoken of. And therefore in other places these same virtues are persuaded to by that consideration, *viz.* that thereby we shall procure a fair esteem, and a general good liking, to our religion. Thus in 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2. that same modesty which in the two next verses is recommended to women, as an ornament to themselves, is there persuaded to, as what would likewise adorn and recommend their religion. *Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they also may, without the word, be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.* And thus also servants are exhorted to be subject and obedient to their masters (which is a fruit of humility) that thereby they may prevent that blame which would be cast upon the Christian religion, if those that embrac'd it should behave themselves disorderly in the stations wherein providence had placed them. 1 Tim. vi. 1. *Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God, and his doctrine, be not blasphemed.* And, *Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things—that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour,* says the same apostle, Tit. ii. 9, 10.

4. Lastly, Another virtue or grace, in the exercise whereof it is our duty to be very constant and exemplary, thereby to procure love and esteem to ourselves, and by consequence, credit and liking to our holy religion, is charity, as it includes all the offices of kindness and compassion, all the acts and expressions of bounty and beneficence.

The diligent practice of all virtues of this kind, is so manifestly comprehended in this general precept: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*; that our church in the offertory of the communion service has placed this text among those other portions of holy Scripture, whereby she means to exhort to works of mercy and charity; as if she thought that this was the prime meaning of it, or rather the only thing intended by it, that we should abound in works of mercy and charity; with an aim to gain glory to God, and reputation to our religion thereby.

And if this was not the only thing here meant, (as indeed I believe it was not) it is nevertheless, most undoubtedly, a considerable part, and a main ingredient of the general duty hereby prescribed; there being no one duty of Christianity that does so much adorn our profession as this; no grace or virtue that singly does so much tend to commend our holy religion to the esteem and practice of those that are yet aliens to it, as that diffusive bounty and unlimited charity, which is enjoin'd by it, and carefully practised by all the true possessors of it.

it. For by this, says our Saviour, *shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.*

'Twas this, I mean the remarkable bounty and charity of the primitive Christians, which brought Christianity into credit at first, as much, nay perhaps more, than the frequent miracles that were then wrought for the confirmation of it: for miracles may be counterfeited; and miracles have been wrought, or at least have seem'd to be so, by false prophets, for the confirmation of a false religion: but there could be no reasonable cause to doubt, but that that religion was from God, which, besides its confirmation by miracles, did so manifestly better the tempers of all those that embrac'd it; which made them so kind and loving, and so ready to do all good, not only to one another, but even to their enemies and persecutors; which disposed them to spend their time and their wealth, to procure the ease, the comfort, and the happiness of their neighbours; which made them readily to sell even houses and lands, and divest themselves of all, when less than all that the rich had was not sufficient to supply the necessities of the poor; and, in a word, which made them in their temper, disposition, and practice, so like to God himself, of whom we have all this natural notion, that he is an infinitely kind, good, merciful, benevolent, and beneficent being.

And by the same means by which Christianity first gained credit in the world, by the same, I say, must the reputation thereof be

upheld; that is, by our abounding in works of mercy and charity.

All other virtues and graces do really make us better in ourselves; but 'tis charity which chiefly, and more than any other single grace, makes us appear better to others: this attracts love and esteem from all that behold it; and they that like not our Christian profession for its own sake, because it lays such restraints upon them as they are unwilling to be under, yet can't chuse but like it for those manifold goodly fruits and effects of charity which it produces in the world.

And now having, as I suppose, said enough for the explication of the duty here enjoin'd, I should have gone on immediately to urge some motives to induce to the practice of it, but that there is one difficulty in the way which seems necessary to be first removed, and that is this; That the precept in the text, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,* and the explication thereof which has been now given, have an appearance of directly contradicting what our Saviour teaches in the next chapter: for there, at the first verse, he bids us *take heed that we do not our alms before men to be seen of them*; at the fifth verse he commands us, *when we pray, not to be as the hypocrites are, who love to stand praying in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men*; but to enter into our closet, and to shut the door, and to pray to our Father in secret: And at the sixteenth verse, he condemns the hypocrites,

hypocrites, who, when they fast, are of a sad countenance, that they may appear unto men to fast; and commands his disciples to put on them the same look that they have at other times, that they appear not unto men to fast, but unto their Father which is in secret.

Now how, it may be ask'd, are these things reconcileable? How can we be as public in the doing of our good works as we are here, and yet as private and secret as we are there directed to be? How can we *let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and yet not do our righteousness before men, to be seen of them?*

But this difficulty will, I suppose, be clearly removed, and these texts easily reconciled, by considering these two things:

1. That what our Saviour there condemns in the Pharisees, and forbids in his disciples, was not their doing in public such acts of virtue and religion as were of a public nature, but their publishing and proclaiming those which ought to have been kept secret: for he does not blame them for praying publicly in the temple, at the hours appointed for prayer; but only for putting up their private petitions (which were more proper for a closet) in places of public concourse, and *in the corners of the streets*: neither does he condemn them for appearing to fast on a public fast-day, but only for publishing their private fasts.

Now these are clearly distinct things, and both good in their proper seasons: for it is necessary sometimes to give alms publicly, to give

a good example of charity to others; and all other times to give alms privately, to approve our sincerity to God, and our own consciences: it is necessary sometimes to pray publicly in the church, the place appointed for divine worship, *in the assemblies of the upright, and with the congregation*; thereby to own publicly our dependence upon God, to confess his name before men, and by our united prayers to obtain at his hands public blessings: but when our confessions or petitions are more peculiar to ourselves, then a closet, with the door shut, is a more proper place than the corner of a street, or than even the temple itself: And thus also, lastly, it is necessary sometimes, *viz.* on days appointed for solemn fasting, to fast publicly, and to appear to do so; and at other times to keep private fasts, between God and ourselves, and let the world know nothing of them. These duties therefore being clearly distinct, and both necessary in their respectively proper seasons, the text which commands the public, and those other places in the next chapter, which command the private exercises of religion, are by no means contrary or repugnant to each other.

2. It may be considered farther, That the ground and reason for which our Saviour here in the text commands the public exercise of religion and virtue, and for which hypocrites do make a public shew of more religion and virtue than really they have, are clearly different: for they, when they give an alms, *sounded a trumpet*, and call'd together a concourse of people to see them; and when they pray'd, they purposely

purposely chose such places to pray in as were most in view; and whenever they fasted, they took care, by *disfiguring* their *faces*, to let the world know it? And why? Our Saviour tells us, that they did all this, that they might have glory of men: this was their ultimate end, to gain praise and applause to themselves, and to advance their worldly interest thereby: and we also (we are plainly so commanded in the text) are to make our *light to so shine before men, that they may see our good works*, but not to the intent that we ourselves may gain honour and reputation thereby, not that we *may have glory of men*; (for if that be our only, or ultimate end, that will be also our only reward.) But what we are to aim at in so *letting our light to shine before men*, is a much greater and nobler design; not merely that we ourselves may appear more glorious, but that so being, and so appearing, our light may serve to direct, and our example to instruct others; what we are ultimately to aim at, is not that we ourselves may have glory of men, but that God may be glorified in us, that men *seeing our good works*, may *glorify our Father which is in heaven*.

And this makes a very clear and wide difference between the practice which our Saviour here commands, and that which in the next chapter he condemns: the actions are indeed to appearance the same, but the ends are clearly different. The hypocrite does his works that they may be seen of men, with no farther view but to gain praise and applause to himself, *God is not in all his thoughts*: and the good Christian like-

wife so does his works that they be seen of men, but not with any, much less with only, a selfish design; but he does the works because God has commanded them, and he does all the same good works at other times when he knows he is seen by none but God; and when he chuses to do them in the sight of the world, as judging it most proper so to do, yet even then 'tis only that other men may by his example be taught and encourag'd to do the same, and that God may thereby be more glorified.

This difficulty therefore being thus removed; I come now to what I propos'd to do in the second place, *viz.*

II. To urge some motives to the practice of the duty here laid upon us; *Let your light, &c.* And to avoid tediousness, I shall at present urge no other but what are suggested in the last words of the text, *That they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* In which words the highly probable effect of our practising the duty is hinted at as a good reason to engage us to it. As if it had been said, "If you are careful to make your *light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, they will so clearly discern the beauty of holiness and virtue in your example, as to be in love with it, and so be incited to imitate and resemble you therein; the blessed consequence of which will be, that God will be glorified in their conversion and salvation.*"

And the natural tendency of good example to provoke others to good works, and the great probability

probability there is, that it will have this effect upon some, at least, if not upon all that see it, is indeed a very powerful inducement to the discharge of the duty here enjoin'd; because if it has this effect, we shall by thus *letting our light shine before men*, bring the greatest glory to God, do the greatest kindness to our neighbour, and obtain the most ample reward to ourselves: any one of which considerations alone is, and therefore much rather are they all together, sufficient to engage to the careful practice of this duty.

1. I say, we shall thereby bring the greatest glory to God: for if we can, by our good example, be a means of converting those that see our good works from a course of sin to a life of righteousness, the consequence of that will be, (1.) That God will be glorified by their mouths; they upon whom this blessed change is wrought, will have great cause to magnify and praise the name of God, for his grace and goodness to them: (2.) That he will be glorified in their lives, which they will thenceforward wholly dedicate to, and spend intirely in his faithful service; and *herein*, says our Saviour, *is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit*: and lastly, that he will be also glorify'd in their salvation, when being pardon'd and justified, and admitted into his glorious presence, they shall spend their whole eternity in singing forth his praises.

And what greater, what nobler design can we propose to ourselves, than to bring glory to God? This is the end of the whole creation;
God

God made all things for his own glory, and every thing that he has made declares his glory and greatness. This in particular was the end for which he made man, the only creature of this lower world that is able actively to give glory to God by expressing his praise; and this, as the apostle teaches us, is the end that we ought to aim at in all our actions, 1 Cor. x. 31. *Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

2. If our good example shall have this blessed effect upon others, if it shall provoke and stir them up to the same good works, we shall also do them the greatest kindness that 'twas possible for us to do them. We reckon it indeed a great kindness (and so it is) to rescue and redeem a man from any bodily pain or danger; but it must needs be a much greater to preserve his soul from eternal destruction; and this is what we shall do, if by the light of our example we instruct; if by the influence of it we incite and encourage him to well-doing. And so St. James tells us, in James v. 19. *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.* And,

3. Lastly, We shall also hereby greatly increase our own reward. For those good works which are done by another, in imitation of our example, will be placed to our account as well as his, as being in great measure owing to us. And thus, by a dextrous management, we may
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by our good act obtain the reward of many, and receive an addition of glory, for the good works of other men done by the influence and encouragement of our example. According to that of the prophet Daniel, Dan. xii. 3. *They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.*

Let therefore your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

And to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be given, as is most due, all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N III.

A good Man satisfied from himself.

By Dr. IBBOT.

PROVERBS xiv. 14.

— *A good man shall be satisfied from himself.*

The whole Verse runs thus :

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways, and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.

THESE words represent to us the different tendency which virtuous and vicious courses naturally have, the one to misery, the other to happiness.

The backslider in heart ; he that, to avoid a danger, revolts from those virtuous courses which he knows he ought to have adhered to ; shall surely feel trouble enough, and bring upon himself misery and ruin by his own devices. *He shall be filled with his own ways.* But a truly good man is, even in this, by far superior to him, that though he should suffer, yet his own integrity, and the clearness and quietness of his conscience, gives him abundant satisfaction.

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A good Man satisfied from himself. 47

By persevering in virtuous courses, he has a spring of comfort arising from himself. *A good man shall be satisfied from himself.*

This phrase of *being filled with his own ways*, is much the same with what we meet with in chap. i. 31. of this book; where 'tis said of the wicked who refused to hearken to God's call, and would not be reclaimed from their sins, that *therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices*. This is parallel to the text, and means that the wicked, the backslider in heart, shall feel the effects of his own folly, and be ruined thereby. *The turning away of the simple shall slay them*. And, on the contrary, *a good man shall likewise reap the fruits of his goodness; he too shall be filled with his own ways, and be satisfied from himself*. And this is what I intend for the subject of my following discourse.

That virtue is its own reward, and is alone sufficient to a happy life, was an opinion in great esteem among the ancient philosophers, especially the Stoics. And though they carried this point too far, and advanced such things in favour of it, as were beyond the reach of human nature; yet it must be owned to be a glorious notion, and that nothing can be said greater in behalf of virtue.

And there is so much truth, as well as goodness in it, that the Scriptures, which always make use of every motive proper to work upon reasonable creatures, do frequently insist upon it. Thus, Prov. iii. 1, 2. *My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:*

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ments: for length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add to thee. And again, ver. 16, 17. where the wise man is recommending the practice of virtue, he tells us, *That length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand, riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

And in the New Testament, temporal prosperity and happiness are frequently promised as a reward to virtue. *Blessed are the meek, (says our Saviour) for they shall inherit the earth,* Matth. v. 5. and vi. 33, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.* And St. Paul tells us, *That godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;* 1 Tim. iv. 8. All which, and many more passages, amount to thus much at least, That a virtuous life is the best course we can take to secure our happiness.

But the philosophers went much farther in their commendations of virtue. They made their wise, *i. e.* their virtuous man, not only regardless, but even insensible of every thing that concerned the body and this life. His virtue was proof against want and pain, and all the miseries and afflictions which could befall the outward man. But this was talking beyond the reach of human nature. It was no better than prevaricating and dissembling, and giving themselves the lye. For the man that is in poverty and pain, who is afflicted in body or estate, let his virtues be never so many and great, will be affected in his mind too, and be far

far from being in a state of present happiness. He cannot help feeling his pain, and being sensible of his wants; and so far as he does this, so far he is miserable.

And therefore religion, which *is our reasonable service*, and treats us like men, does not require unreasonable things of us, nor that we should behave ourselves above the measures of a man. It does not pretend to make us insensible of evils, nor prohibit the use of all lawful means to prevent or remove them. On the contrary, religion lays the best foundation for our happiness in this world, by prescribing such rules, as, if we observe them, will enable us either to avoid these temporal evils, or will support us under them. So that supposing the sinner and the saint, the wicked and the righteous, to have the same advantages with respect to these outward things, to be in the same or the like circumstances, whether of prosperity or adversity; the one will be, not only less miserable, but much happier than the other. The good man will have more pleasure in the good things of this life, and less of the evils than the wicked. Besides which, he has enjoyments peculiar to himself, which the sinner is a perfect stranger to; and which will, in a great measure, supply the want of every thing else, and fully demonstrate the truth of the text, *That a good man is satisfied from himself.*

By a good man, we are to understand one who is universally so; who keeps inflexibly to his duty at all times, and in all instances what-

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ever. The man that is sober and temperate, meek and humble, just and merciful; and all this upon principles of religion and conscience. And therefore as he behaves himself thus towards his neighbour and himself; so he will demean himself with all piety and devotion, reverence, resignation, and submission towards God.

Now of such a man as this, it may be truly affirmed;

1. That he is most likely to escape the evils and calamities of life, and to pass through this world the freest from troubles and vexations.

2. Whatever calamities or afflictions befall him, he is better able to bear with, than other people.

3. He has pleasures and enjoyments peculiar to himself, which others are strangers to; and which will in a great measure supply the want of external blessings, and make him *satisfied from himself*.

These are the particulars which I have already hinted, and shall now more distinctly consider.

1. A good man is most likely to escape the evils and calamities of life, and to pass through this world the freest from troubles and vexations.

His virtues will be a natural defence and security to him against many evils and miseries, which would otherwise befall him. And though he must not expect to escape the common and unavoidable accidents of life, and to

be above the reach of those miseries and misfortunes which are the inseparable attendants of this imperfect state of things, and the very condition of our being here: yet he will come off with less hurt, and fair much better than other people.

For many, I might say, most of those things which imbitter human life, and disturb mens peace and quiet, arise from their faults or follies, their unreasonable lusts and unruly passions. Intemperance and excess are destructive of the good health and constitution of our bodies; they bring diseases and sickness upon us; they cut short our days, or make life a burden to us. Malice and ill-nature, cruelty and revenge, disturb the calm and repose of our minds, and by that means impair the health of our bodies too; and besides this, have an ill influence upon our outward circumstances; for they set men against us, and make them our enemies; they hinder and obstruct us in the management of our concerns, and make business difficult; and they bring down many wrongs and injuries upon us, which we might easily have escaped, if we could but have governed our passions, and been better natured. Covetousness and ambition, besides the inquietude of mind which constantly attends them, bring innumerable inconveniences upon us, and are much more likely to ruin, than to raise us. But the good man, who harbours none of these unruly passions, nor gives way to humour and fancy, prejudice and prepossession; but, in all his

desires and endeavours, keeps within those bounds which nature and reason have fixed, and religion has more fully established; will escape most of these inconveniencies.

He places his happiness in the favour of God, and the sense of his own integrity; and is not so eager in any secular projects and designs, as to run himself into any danger, or to ruin his own inward peace and quiet. He is not insensible of temporal blessings, nor does he undervalue the good things of this life: But then he does not overvalue them, nor is immoderate in his pursuits of them. He desires no more than what he wants; and he wants no more than what he can use and enjoy; and this reduces his necessities to a narrow compass.

He bears an universal good-will to all mankind, and is always ready to do all the good he can to others; and therefore is not likely to meet with so many injuries, and so much ill-treatment, as they who are of the contrary temper and behaviour.

He is sober and temperate in all his pleasures and enjoyments; and this upon a principle of religion and virtue; and therefore he is in a much fairer way both to get and to keep those two essential ingredients of true happiness, a sound mind and a sound body, than they who set no bounds to their appetites and passions.

Thus we see, a good man does by his virtues remove the chief causes of trouble and disquiet, and take out of the way the great obstacles and impediments of happiness, since these

these arise from our inordinate affections and irregular desires, which 'tis the business of religion to govern and restrain. So far then as the being free from pain is one step to pleasure, and the avoiding misery is a good beginning and foundation of happiness; so far will a good man be happy, and *satisfied from himself*. This is the natural effect of the virtues he is possessed of, and will, for the most part, be the consequence of them: I say, for the most part; for that it will sometimes prove otherwise, cannot be denied. But then, I observe,

2. That whatever calamities or afflictions befall a good man, he will bear with, much better than other people.

As the principles upon which he acts, keep him from running out into vain expectations, and engaging in fruitless attempts; so whenever he is disappointed in his just expectations, he can easily bear it. The disappointment will not be so great to him, who takes an estimate of things, not from fancy and opinion, but from truth and reality, and the just weight and moment of them.

If he meets with losses in his outward circumstances, and is deprived of a great part of what he possessed; he will not be uneasy, because he knows that the happiness of a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses; and he will think the remainder sufficient for the ends of wisdom and virtue, sufficient to satisfy nature,

and to supply the wants and necessities, if not the comforts and conveniences of life.

If he be slighted, and undervalued, slandered and reproached; he considers that men are apt to mistake, and that he knows himself more and better than others do: and therefore if the ill that is reported of him be true, he deserves it, and will take care to amend, and to merit a better character: if what he is charged with, be false and groundless, 'tis their fault, and not his; and he cannot help it. 'Tis what the best men have been liable to, as well as he; and many times the better they have been, the worse treatment have they met with this way. But nothing of this kind can take away the joy of a good conscience, or deprive him of the comfortable testimony of his own mind. And so long as he has this on his side, and has nothing to accuse himself of, 'tis a small thing with him to be judged of man's judgment.

If he labours under pain and sickness, any bodily distemper or infirmity; this though it cannot be denied to be an evil, and inconsistent with a state of perfect happiness; yet it may be considered, 1. That this, generally speaking, is not so likely to befall good men as others, because virtue is certainly an admirable means of preserving our health, and will keep us free from many pains and diseases, which vicious and irregular courses expose men to; either by being the first cause and occasion of them, or by heightening and increasing them when they proceed from other things. And,

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2. Where these things are unavoidable, and the common lot of all men; the virtuous man will be less troubled and concerned, and feel less pain from them than the wicked. For he has all along been accustomed to sobriety and temperance, abstinence and self-denial; and these virtues are good preparatives for hardships and sufferings of any kind. They gird up the loins of our mind, fortify our souls, and fit them to meet with adverse fortune. Whereas the man, who has given himself up to riotous living, *whose God is his belly*, and who has always taken his ease, and indulged in softness and sensuality, is, of all others, the most unfit for an afflicted state. Every calamity and misfortune will fall with a double weight upon him; pain and want, and sickness, will make a deeper impression upon him, and pierce him to the quick.

So that the godly has much the advantage of the sinner in these respects. Though his virtues are not full proof against the strokes of fortune, and cannot ward off every blow, yet they will blunt the edge of afflictions, and greatly abate their smart.

And in general, we may lay it down as an excellent rule for the conduct of our lives, and the making ourselves as happy as we can in this imperfect state; to consider the uncertainty of all these external enjoyments, not to overvalue them, or set our hearts upon them, or place our happiness in them; but to sit as loose as we can from this world, that so we may not be overwhelmed with grief at any loss or disappointment we

meet with. This is a lesson which the good man is perfect master of, and whereby he will find rest to his soul amidst all the changes and chances of this mortal life. But the wicked, who place all their happiness in this uncertain world, and value nothing but the things of this life, will never want matter of trouble and vexation.

For what makes the ambitious man, who is furnished with all that a reasonable soul can desire, discontented and uneasy; but because he is immoderately fond of honour and applause, because he overvalues himself and his own merits, and thinks that he is not sufficiently taken notice of and distinguished? Why is the rich man, who has goods laid up for many years, many more than he can ever live to see, so solicitous to encrease his store, and so fearful of every little loss, but because he is immoderately in love with this world, and the things that are in the world: I say, what is the disturber of his peace, but covetousness?

It were easy to show this of every other irregular desire, and inordinate affection. And therefore the good man, whose religion has taught him to moderate his desires, and to subdue every inordinate passion, is above the reach of these disturbances, and can easily bear that which other people cannot endure. He is already in the heavenly state; he is raised aloft; and sees this world, and all that is in it, beneath his feet; and can contentedly leave it to be enjoyed by those who have no relish for any thing better. To which purpose I observe,

3. That

3. That a good man has pleasures and enjoyments peculiar to himself, which other people are strangers to, and which will, in a great measure, supply the want of external blessings, and *make him satisfied from himself.*

The precepts of religion are, in themselves, holy, just and good; they are so suitable and agreeable to the nature and reason of man, that we ought to observe and obey them upon their own account, though there was nothing to reward our obedience, or to punish our disobedience. In this sense it is an undeniable truth, That virtue is its own reward, and that happiness consists in the very doing of virtuous actions. And therefore a wise man is satisfied with the conscience of well-doing, and would not part with the pleasure arising from hence upon any account. He would not do any dishonest or wicked thing, to avoid any suffering or torment whatsoever. The reason is, because God hath planted in our nature an aversion from vice and wickedness, and a dislike to it: so that we cannot but condemn ourselves for doing any thing that is base and dishonest, unrighteous and unjust. No man that is guilty of any thing of this kind, can acquit or absolve himself: nor will any terror or torment whatever, justify, or free us from blame, if to avoid it, we do any thing of this nature.

But on the contrary, if we resolutely stick to that which is good, whatever we suffer for it; we satisfy our own conscience, and rejoice with joy unspeakable in having done so, and
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gain the approbation and applause both of God and man.

Every one that has right apprehensions of good and evil, cannot but receive great satisfaction in avoiding the one, and following the other. That man will be infinitely happy in himself, and appear amiable in the eyes of others, who keeps himself pure from all contagion of the things of this earth: who, when he beholds all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them is presented to his view, as it was to our Saviour's, yet he is not dazzled by it, nor drawn aside from the ways of righteousness, nor made to behave himself unworthily in any instance, or transgress his duty towards God or man.

What a glorious spectacle is he to God, as well as to angels and men, who encounters dangers, and grapples with difficulties in the discharge of his duty; who bids defiance to the solicitations and examples of the men and things of this world, and is able to get the better of them all? What joy will such a victory as this, raise in heaven? And how fitly may God say of such a person, as he did of Job to Satan, *Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth; a perfect and an upright man?* Job ii. 3. God seems to upbraid the tempter, that he could not prevail against him.

And most certainly, 'tis admirable to behold such an object as this. We cannot choose but think it to be the most desirable state and condition, what will make us happy in ourselves, and

and accepted with God. The pleasure which results from this frame and temper of mind, from having kept our innocence, and done the thing that is right, notwithstanding all the temptations to the contrary; is so far beyond any sensual satisfactions and worldly enjoyments, that when we have once tasted it, we shall be unwilling to part with it upon any account, and shall think nothing too much to be done to improve it.

Every good and virtuous action we do, affords us a double pleasure. It first strikes our minds with a direct pleasure, by its suitableness to our nature; and then our minds entertain themselves with pleasant reflections upon it. The more we abound in such actions as these, the more true pleasure we enjoy; and no greater happiness on this side heaven can be conceived, than a continued course of such actions, *i. e.* a life of religion and virtue. This is that state and temper of mind, that peace and joy, that tranquillity and security, wherein heaven itself consists. This is the proper happiness of man, as he is a rational creature; and is the same to the soul, as health and strength are to the body. These encrease its vigour and activity; they put it into the best and easiest state, and set it at the greatest distance from all trouble and disquiet.

So that though it cannot be denied that these outward things are God's blessings, and were graciously designed to contribute to our happiness, yet still virtue is the main ingredient; in so much that without it the whole world cannot
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make us happy; and with it, a very small share of other things will suffice.

Suppose a man in never so flourishing a condition in his outward circumstances; yet, if he be destitute of virtue; if he has no government of himself and his passions; if he runs out into the excess of riot; if he allows himself in acts of cruelty, injustice and oppression, or any other unlawful courses; he will have much inward trouble and disquiet, many a melancholy thought and reflection. His guilt will sit heavy upon him, and the divine vengeance will hang continually over him, and through fear of death he will be all his life-time subject unto bondage.

But the man that is conscious to himself of his own integrity, whose heart does not reproach him; who, though he is not perfectly innocent (*as who is he that liveth and sinneth not?*) yet he is sincere; has never offended of malicious wickedness, nor been grossly negligent of his duty; but has made it his business through the whole course of his life to keep a conscience void of offence, towards God and towards man; though this person be in a low and afflicted state, and his outward condition is mean and miserable, yet he has something within him to support him under it.

Though he is under outward miseries and afflictions, yet he has the satisfaction to feel that all is right and sound within. He has the pleasure to consider, that though he has not met with any great success in the world, yet he has kept himself unspotted from it; and
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could never be prevailed upon to yield to any unlawful embraces. He can recollect with great satisfaction the many conquests he has gained over riches, honours, and sensuality; and how in all his conflicts with flesh and blood, his reason has kept the field, and his faith has overcome the world. This is matter of triumph and delight, and unspeakable satisfaction.

Nor is this all the pleasure we have from a virtuous life. It fills us with strong and lively hopes, that, whatever our present condition is, it will some time or other go better with us. The truly good man feels himself in such an excellent frame and state of mind, that he knows certainly that this must be the state of God himself, and then he must love those that are so like him. Besides, he is conscious to himself that he has deserved no ill at any man's hands: on the contrary, it has been his study to oblige men by doing them all the good offices in his power. This raises in him a probable expectation that it may go well with him among men in this world; but the firm persuasion he has of the love of God, and the happiness of heaven, this is joy unspeakable and full of glory.

From what has been said upon this argument, it appears,

First, How unjust that reproach is, which is cast upon religion and virtue, that they deprive us of all joy and comfort of our lives, all delight and satisfaction, and fill us with melancholy and sadness of heart; and that when
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once we enter upon a religious course of life, we must bid adieu to all the mirth and pleasure of this world, and sigh and weep out our days.

That this is an untrue and groundless charge, they well know, who are acquainted with the ways of piety and virtue, and have experienced the pleasure and satisfaction arising from them. The practice of religion and virtue is agreeable to the nature and inclinations of good men. Every good and virtuous action is as grateful and pleasing to a good man, as meat to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty. It is as great a satisfaction to his rational inclinations, as they are to his sensual appetites. *My meat, says our blessed Saviour, is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.* John iv. 34. To the same purpose is that of holy Job: *Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth, more than my necessary food.* Job xxii. 12.

Delight and pleasure, inward contentment and satisfaction of mind, peace and tranquillity of soul, are the inseparable attendants of religious and virtuous actions, and do naturally follow the fear of God, and the keeping his commandments. When a man has done his duty, and spent his time well, he can reflect upon his doings with comfort. He is not afraid to review his past life, and to call himself to an account for what he has done. And this is a never-failing spring of comfort. But this joy is peculiar to the righteous, and this joyful gladness is for none but such as are upright in heart.

'Tis a pleasure which the wicked are strangers to, and which sinners can never pretend to partake of.

And for the pleasures and enjoyments of this life, God has not forbid us the use and participation of them; but has commanded it, as far as 'tis agreeable to reason, and to our true interest. Religion does not prohibit any thing else but our excesses in the use of these things, and prevents our follies and mistakes about them, and teaches us so to regulate ourselves in all our enjoyments here, as to heighten our pleasures, and make them more truly deserving that name. And therefore,

Secondly, Hence we see the reason why so many who profess religion, and are sincere in this profession, pass their days so uncomfortably, are perpetually uneasy and disquieted, and reap so little joy and comfort from their religion. All this arises from their mistakes about religion, and placing it either in things which do not belong to it at all, and make no part of it, or which are not the main and essential ingredients of it, the things wherein the life and power of it consist.

Sometimes religion is distinguished from virtue, and preferred before it: and then 'tis no wonder that men feel no pleasure in their religion, when it is destitute of virtue, which is the only thing that is valuable in religion, and that carries its own reward along with it. Much less can it be wondered, that they find no real satisfaction in their religion, who place it all in
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external forms and modes of worship, and take up with the instrumental parts of it, in a constant round and succession of outward observances and performances, without any regard to the true end and design of these appointments, *i. e.* to make the comers thereunto really better. For this is the true measure and standard of religion, the good effect it has upon us. If our religion does not make us really better, we cannot expect to be the happier for it. These two will keep an exact proportion: and though we may possibly quiet ourselves a little for the present, without any real amendment or improvement; this is but a false peace, and 'twill be in the power of every little cross accident to break it.

Some men mistake superstition for religion; and this, instead of quieting their consciences, fills them with endless fears and scruples, and puts them upon such practices as God never required at their hands, and which are, in their own nature, more likely to provoke, than to please, his divine majesty.

Others place religion in melancholy and moroseness, in sequestering themselves from the world, in bodily exercise, in voluntary acts of abstinence and self-denial in the most lawful and innocent matters; in imposing hardships and severities upon themselves, in literally mortifying the body, and crucifying the flesh; like the worshippers of Baal, who cut themselves after their manner, with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them, 2 Kings xviii. 28.

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As if God was a cruel and revengeful being; who envied the happiness of his creatures, and took delight in their misery and torment.

Whereas 'tis certain that he wills the happiness of mankind, and therefore enjoins them holiness, because that is the only way to happiness, as it is the only way whereby we can resemble him, who is the fountain of happiness.

And therefore, since all these severities may be undergone without mortifying any one lust or passion, without advancing one step in real goodness; since men may deal thus severely by themselves, and yet be cruel and revengeful to others; since they may undergo all this penance, and yet be as malicious and censorious, as proud and covetous, as sensual and worldly as ever; they cannot expect that this should make any accession to their happiness, which adds nothing to their virtues, or that they should feel any of the effects of religion, when they are destitute of the thing itself.

3. And *Lastly*, From the whole, we may discern the true cause of that vanity and vexation of spirit, that trouble and uneasiness, that labour and sorrow which is to be found under the sun.

When we look abroad into the world, we find all places full of discontents and complaints. They abound in the city and country; neither solitude nor society can exclude them; nor any state and condition of life can exempt us from them. They ascend the thrones of princes, and visit the palaces of the nobles; and creep into the cottages of the poor; and

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like death itself, are equally incident to men of every rank. But whence does this proceed? Is man born to all this trouble? Is it entailed upon him by the great Author of his being, and is there no avoiding it? How then shall we vindicate the goodness of God in making man? For if these vexations be fatal and inevitable, most true is that saying, *That it is better to die than live; and he who is not yet born, is in a better condition than either.*

But if there be any truth in the foregoing discourse, if *a good man shall be satisfied from himself*; this will justify our great Creator, by showing us that the true reason why there is so little satisfaction and contentment, and so much dissatisfaction and discontent to be found in the world, is because there is so little goodness, so little of true religion and virtue among us.

That there are many inevitable occasions of trouble and disquiet, cannot be denied; that poverty and want, pain and sickness, are evils, and so many hindrances and impediments to happiness, cannot be questioned by any man who is in his senses. But then, why are they so unhappy who are free from these things? What is the rust that corrupts the treasures of the rich? What is the worm that preys upon the gourd of the wealthy, and makes it wither? In a word, what is it, that makes those inwardly uneasy and discontented, who are outwardly prosperous and happy? I say, what is this, but the want of true virtue and goodness, and that inward self-satisfaction and contentment which arises from thence? The want of this comfort
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and support, makes those afflictions and miseries which we meet with in this transitory world set so heavy upon us, and sinks us under them. The conclusion therefore of the whole matter is this: That to fear God and keep his commandments, is the best preservative against the evils of this life, and the only security from the miseries of the next.

S E R M O N IV.

The Effects of good and bad Principles.

By Dr. IBBOT.

MATTHEW vi. 22, 23.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

IF we suppose these words to have a strict connexion with what went before, we must understand by the single eye, liberality; and by the evil eye, covetousness: for this was the subject of the two preceding verses; and in this sense, these expressions are frequently used in Scripture.

But it will be difficult to give the words their full scope, under this restriction; and therefore I rather think that our Saviour, according to his usual manner, takes occasion from this particular instance, to advance a
general

general doctrine: and from the ill influence which covetousness has upon our minds, cautions us against letting our minds be biassed by any wrong judgment, and suffering ourselves to be carried away by any corrupt passion or inordinate affection; upon account of the bad effect this will have upon our conduct, upon our whole life, and all our actions.

For what the eye is to the body, that is the mind or understanding to the life of man. When the eye is single, that is, clear and free from any distemper or vicious humour, the whole body is full of light: we can then see how to direct its several members in their motions, as if it had eyes in every part. But when the eye is evil, when that is vitiated and corrupted, dim and obscure, it either sees things in a wrong light, or not at all; and then our whole body is full of darkness, and we cannot direct our steps nor order our goings. So if our mind and understanding be free from any false biass, from any corrupt passion, or partial affection; if our judgment be right, and our opinion of things grounded upon truth; then our life has a true guide to rule it, and our conduct will be wise and right: but if our judgment be vitiated and corrupted, if our mind be stocked with wrong notions and false principles; if our understanding be misinformed, and our conscience erroneous; if that which should be our guide, be blind itself; if that which should enlighten us, be dark itself; we have then nothing to direct us; but shall be exposed to infinite errors and dangerous mistakes; and the farther we go

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on, we shall be so much the more out of our way, without any prospect of coming right. How great is that darkness! What disorder and confusion shall we then be in! How wretched and miserable must be such a state!

The words thus explained, naturally lead me to consider, how much it concerns us to keep our minds free from any vicious passion, or inordinate affection; the great importance of preserving our judgment clear and uncorrupt, of having our understandings rightly informed, and being under the influence of true and stable principles; since this is our greatest security against sin and error, and will give a right turn to our life and actions.

In handling this subject, I shall,

I. Briefly, and in general, show the influence which mens principles have upon their practice.

II. I shall distinctly consider the different effects of good and bad principles.

III. From whence it will be evident in the third place, How much it concerns us to furnish our minds with good principles, and to take care that no ill principle whatever prevails over us.

IV. And *Lastly*, I shall close all with two or three inferences and observations from the whole.

I. Briefly, and in general, to show the influence which mens principles have upon their practice.

The judgment of the mind is the guide of life; and for the most part, mens outward actions

tions are governed by their inward sentiments and opinions. They form to themselves some design, and lay down some principle or other; and this, whatever it be, gets the ascendant of every thing else, is most of all in their minds, and has the prevailing sway in their actions. Hence 'tis very common for men, when they are asked a reason, why they do this or that, why they follow such or such a course? to reply, "This is my principle, this is my judgment in the case." And whatever this principle or judgment be, they generally act accordingly.

Whatever we judge most valuable, and set our heart upon, it will partake most of that object. If our hearts be set upon riches, they will be found amongst the stuff, and we shall mind earthly things, and our whole man will be engaged in laying up treasures in this world. If sensual pleasure be our chief delight, we shall be immersed in the body, our God will be our belly, and we shall study nothing so much as the gratification of our bodily appetites and inclinations. If we place our happiness in being applauded and cried up by others, we shall be carried away with pride and vain-glory, calculate all our actions for public view, and do any thing that is bad to obtain the good word and the good opinion of men. But if instead of thus judging, if instead of setting the greatest value upon this world's goods, and letting our hearts be captivated with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; we esteem these things to be of an indifferent nature, and

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inferior concern; and are persuaded that there are other things within our reach, of infinitely greater consequence and value: this will raise our minds to other contemplations than those men indulge, who look not beyond this spot of earth, and those perishing things which are here to be had.

This will give a new turn to our thoughts, and put us upon other pursuits. Instead of striving to please men, and gain popular applause; we shall study to recommend ourselves to our heavenly Father, and seek the honour which cometh from God only. Instead of laying up for ourselves treasures upon earth, and labouring for the meat that perishes; we shall lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, and desire that meat which endureth to eternal life. In a word, we shall then choose what is absolutely best, and cleave to what is best, and pursue it, without ever deviating or swerving from it in any of our actions. Such is the influence which mens principles have upon their practice; they give a tincture and a favour to all their actions, and the general course and bent of their lives depends upon them.

And thus it must needs be, as long as men do not act by any natural necessity, by any blind instinct or impulse, nor are under the power of giddy chance, or over-ruling fate and destiny, but are rational and free agents, and left to their own liberty and choice: they cannot but be determined by their judgment and opinion of things, and square their actions according to the notions and principles they have imbibed.

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The reason of their minds will be the rule of their practice, and their passions and affections will follow their present judgment.

Whether they reason well or ill, whether they judge right or wrong, is another question. But there can be no question made, whether their conduct and behaviour be influenced and guided by their notions and sentiments.

I proceed therefore in the

II. Place, to consider more distinctly, the different effects of good and bad principles.

1. Of the good effect and influence of good principles.

If *our eye be single*, if we are free from all false notions and corrupt opinions; if we have a true judgment of what is our chief happiness, and wherein it consists; what is the great end of life, and what are the ways which lead to that end: *our whole body will be full of light*, and, as St. Luke adds, *having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright spinning of a candle doth give thee light.* Luke xi.

36. Discretion will then guide us, and understanding will keep us; and our whole life and all our actions will be ordered right, and have an uniform tendency to promote our true interest. We shall then be steady and constant in the pursuit of the *one thing needful*, without ever standing still, or diverting to any other end.

This will prove our best security both against the enticements of our own lusts, and the allurements of the world. Whatever temptations we meet with (and many we must expect to meet in every state and condition of life) will
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lose their force, and easily be repelled, if we have firm and stable principles of piety and virtue, *if our eye be single*, if we be at unity with ourselves; and it be our settled judgment, and fixed principle, in no case, and upon no account whatever, to forsake God's righteous judgments.

The man that has a true principle of honesty and honour, will scorn to oppress or defraud his neighbour, even his greatest enemy, though he could do it with never so much secrecy and safety. He will never violate his conscience, nor part with his integrity, though he could gain the Indies by so doing. For he does not believe right and wrong, honest and dishonest, to be defined only by law, and not by nature; if he did, wherever he could escape the law, he would think himself at liberty: but he believes himself to be under obligations antecedent to all human constitutions: and this furnishes him with other measures of moral rectitude and pravity, and more steadfast principles of action.

He that firmly believes the unspeakable joys and endless happiness of another life, will never be captivated and ensnared by sensual pleasures, and drawn into a forgetfulness of himself and the great things he is designed for; but will consider that he is a stranger and a pilgrim here; and will, for that reason, abstain from those fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

Whenever he has occasion offered him of making a figure in the world, and raising his name and reputation by unlawful means, he
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will remember that he is the servant of God, and will recommend himself to him, however he may be condemned or approved by men. Whatever provocations he may meet with to anger and envy, malice and revenge, or any other irregular passion, he will still be master of himself, and keep within due bounds. His principles will make him steadfast and unmoveable, or at least will hinder him from being transported into any unjustifiable excess. Of whatever kind the temptation be which assaults him, he is ready furnished with considerations which will enable him to bear up against it. Whatever solicits him, his answer is still the same: *Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.* As long as he keeps his eye single, and his judgment uncorrupted; while he retains a true principle of virtue, and a right relish for spiritual things; as long as his eye is fixed upon the *one thing needful*, and 'tis his judgment that he ought to pursue that, whatever becomes of every thing else: he will see things in a clear and distinct light, and will not easily be imposed upon through the deceitfulness of sin.

And if at any time he falls, through weakness or inadvertency, ignorance or surprize, he will quickly see his error, and recover himself out of the snare of the devil. The good principles which he always carries about him, and which are rooted in him, will, through the grace of God, prove a powerful means of raising him up. He will reflect with shame, that
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he has deserted the cause he had espoused, forsaken the rule he was to walk by, acted contrary to his own maxims. And this will make him uneasy 'till he has got again into the right way, 'till he has corrected what was amiss, and brought his practice to an agreement with his principles.

Such is the good effect and influence of a single eye, of a sound judgment, and firm principles of religion and virtue. This is the best preservative against sin and error, and the most effectual means of our recovery.

Which will more fully appear, if we consider,

2. The ill influence and effect which bad principles have upon us.

'Tis necessary for us to have some principles or other, if we would have our life answer any purpose. Without this, we are like the double-minded man, whom St. James describes, who *is unstable in all his ways*, Jam. i. 8. who has no particular interest to serve, but is divided between several; between the interest of this world, and of the other. Such a man is always weak and wavering, unstable and inconsistent in all his actions. He has several ends to serve, which many times cross one another; and so he pursues none of them vigorously; but while he is moving towards one, inclines to another; and like a needle between two loadstones, is ever in a trembling posture, and doubtful state of mind.

This is the condition of a man that has no principles at all.

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Next to this, 'tis as bad to have no good principles, no true principles of religion and virtue; for without these we shall be exposed to every temptation, and liable to change with every wind. Having no fixed principle within us, we shall adhere to nothing upon any firm grounds; but shall be ever varying, as the complexion of our body, or the temper of our mind, or the circumstances of external affairs happen to alter. We shall be superstitious at one time, careless or prophane at another; now a sceptic, and then a dogmatist; of one religion to-day, and of another to-morrow, and the next day of neither; and at last, perhaps, of no religion at all.

As long as the world goes well with such a man as this, and he finds his interest in his duty, he will be loyal to his prince, true to his country, and faithful to his friend: but whenever the times alter, and these virtues are out of fashion, and become the object of scorn and reproach, and cannot be practised without apparent hazard to his own private interest; he will basely desert them, and will be sure to save himself, whatever becomes of every body else. And this will put him upon any acts of treachery and injustice, of force or fraud, which are necessary to compass his self-ends.

Thus insecure will that man be of himself, who wants the single eye, who is destitute of good principles; and such wild and contrary sallies will he be subject to. He is governed only by present interest or humour; and upon the least variation of these, he will quickly be

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supplanted, reel and stagger like a drunken man, and be at his wit's end. And whenever he falls, he has nothing to help him up; for he has no principles of religion and virtue; which, as I before observed, next to the grace of God, are the best, if not the only means of reclaiming us from the error of our ways.

But now suppose, that instead of the bare want of good principles, a man hath imbibed such as are really bad; that he has an *evil eye*, a corrupt judgment, an erroneous conscience: what dangers and mischiefs will not such a man be exposed to, and what wickedness will he not commit? He is ready prepared for any evil work he shall be put upon, by the enticement of sinners, the suggestions of the Devil, or his own wicked heart. *He walks in the dark, and knows not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes; 1 John ii. 11.* He falls into mistake upon mistake, runs from one mischief into another, and adds sin unto sin.

His *whole body is full of darkness*, and he neither knows nor observes any difference in his actions. The iniquity he commits, he does not see to be such; but perhaps thinks it to be good, and believes himself obliged to commit it, and therefore commits it with greediness. For there is no wickedness so obstinately persisted in, and so furiously pursued, as that which proceeds from principle, upon a false persuasion of mind. And therefore, if we find it so difficult, even by the help of good principles, to preserve our integrity, and resist the temptations we meet with; if the weakness and depravity of

of our natures be such, that even with this assistance we cannot always stand upright; what will become of us, if we want it? But if we not only want good principles, but our minds are stocked with ill ones, we shall then fall with double force, and our recovery will be exceeding difficult. When temptations from without meet with ill principles from within; they will take fast hold of us, and we shall be led captive by the Devil at his will. When *the light that is in us is darkness*, what a hideous darkness will then overwhelm us? And *when the blind lead the blind*, it must needs be that *both fall into the ditch*.

Hence it will evidently appear in the

III. Place, How much it concerns us to furnish our minds with good principles, and to take care that no ill principle whatever prevails over us.

What the eye is to the body, that, our Saviour tells us, is some leading principle in the soul, to the soul of man. And 'tis of as much consequence to the soul, that this leading principle be right, as 'tis to the body to have our eye-sight clear and good: and so much more so, as the soul is more valuable than the body. If therefore we justly reckon those miserable, who are deprived of the light of the sun, who grope at noon-day as in the dark, seeking for some to lead them; and instead of that beautiful prospect which the works of nature afford others, are presented with an universal blank: how much more deplorable is the condition of those men, whose minds are blinded, and their
souls

souls over-spread with darkness, with ignorance and error; or thick mists of vicious lusts and passions; who discern not the beauty of holiness, nor see the wonders of God's laws; but are blind to their true interest, and sit down in darkness, and the shadow of death.

This spiritual blindness can no other way be prevented, but by keeping our eye single, and our judgment right, and our reason uncorrupted by any false principle, vicious passion, or inordinate affection. For whenever any thing of this kind becomes the leading principle in us, whether it be sensuality, avarice, or ambition, it will turn us out of the right way, and lead us thro' dark and slippery places, where we shall find it difficult to keep our feet, and uphold our goings. If our reason be not the guide and superintendent of our inferior powers, but is under subjection to them; if it be obscured or extinguished, bias'd or perverted by any wrong motive; every thing will be out of course, and nothing but confusion and disorder will ensue. If we judge amiss, and are under the influence of any great error or delusion; vigor and activity, instead of helping us forward on our journey, will lead us the more out of our way: diligence and industry will prove mischievous and fatal; instead of promoting our interest, will procure our ruin, and hasten our destruction. Every step we take, upon a mistaken principle, upon a false notion of what is our true happiness, and the way that leads to it, upon a wrong sense of what is our duty and our interest; I say, every step which we thus take,

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is dangerous, and may end in our ruin. But, at least, 'tis so much time and labour lost; 'tis not only going out of the way that leads to our main end, but 'tis going directly from it; 'tis going so far, to return as far back again; 'tis doing what we must undo, and cutting out work for a bitter repentance.

Whereas, if we proceed upon right principles, and act upon true notions of good and evil, of what makes for or against our chief happiness: every step we take does really advance us in the right way; and whatever we do in pursuance of these, will turn to a good account, and help forward our main end. There will then be light, and order, and beauty, in our several actions, and they will all conspire to promote our true interest. We shall have a clear prospect of our great end, without any thing to intercept our view, or divert our course: and we shall steer through all the waves of this troublesome world, through all the mazes and windings, all the perils and dangers of such a difficult passage; to that haven of happiness, that eternal rest, which remains for the people of God.

Of such importance is it to have our minds furnished with good principles, and to prevent ill ones from prevailing over us; since upon this depends the wise conduct of our lives, the right ordering of our actions, the obtaining eternal happiness, and avoiding endless misery. I come now in the

IV. And last place, to apply what has been said, in several inferences and observations.

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1. Hence appears the great usefulness and necessity of knowledge and understanding, especially in religion and matters of a moral nature. 'Tis St. Peter's advice, that we should *add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge*; 2 Pet. i. 5. And St. Paul's prayer for the Philippians is, *That their love may abound more and more, in knowledge, and in all judgment*. And he disparages one of the most excellent and illustrious things in all religion, because it was not under the influence and direction of knowledge. *They have a zeal for God*, says he, *but not according to knowledge*; Rom. x. 2. And to name no more, our blessed Saviour blames the Samaritans, because *they worshipped they knew not what*; John iv. 22. and prefers the Jews before them, because *they knew what they worshipped*.

Of such account is knowledge and understanding in religion. And this not only because those actions which are done without the use of our understanding, are not the actions of a man, but of something that is short of man, and have no more virtue in them than the actions of a mere natural agent; but chiefly because our knowledge and understanding will have the main direction of our lives and actions. Such as our principles are, such in the main will our practice be. If we have right notions of God and religion, just apprehensions of the beauty and excellence of virtue, and of the baseness and deformity of sin; this will not only put us into the right way, but keep us in it. But if we entertain any false opinions of God and religion, they

they will produce many errors and mistakes in our practice; and we shall turn from the practice of true piety and virtue, into a blind superstition, or an ignorant zeal, which will betray us into an unwarrantable course of proceedings. If we think of any thing worse than of sin, and are less afraid of it than we are of poverty or pain, shame and disgrace; we shall soon be drawn into it. And if we prefer any thing before virtue, whether it be riches, or honours, or sensual gratifications; we shall not long retain our innocence, but shall be ready to give it up to any temptation we meet with.

2. From what has been said, it appears how cautious we should be in the choice of our principles; as much as we should be in the choice of a guide to conduct us through an unknown and difficult way.

Our principle will have the rule and government of our lives; and therefore we should never take them upon trust, without examining into them, and seeing whether they be sound and good. For if we set out wrong, and build upon a false bottom, our work will never abide the trial: and though we ourselves should be saved, yet it will be, as the apostle expresses it, 1 Cor. iii. 15. so as by fire, i. e. it will be difficult, and we shall narrowly escape the danger.

For though a good intention will justify an indifferent action, a thing in itself lawful; yet in matters directly sinful and unlawful, this maxim has no place. 'Tis our duty, and should always be our first care, to inform our consciences, and get a right judgment in all things;

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and then to act agreeably to this knowledge, and according to the best of our judgment. But if we neglect the first of these, we shall certainly fail in the second, and that failure will be placed to our account.

The wise man stiles our reason, *The candle of the Lord*, which he has lighted up in every man's breast to direct his goings; and 'tis incumbent upon us to keep in this light, to cherish and improve it, that we may see our way to happiness, and discern those things which make for our peace. But if we wilfully obscure or extinguish this light, by any lust or vice; by any unreasonable prejudice, partiality, or passion; darkness will then overtake us indeed; but we ourselves shall be severely responsible for every wrong step we take, every error or mistake we are guilty of.

To this natural light, God has been pleased to add a new and an additional light of revelation. His word, as well as our own reason, is *a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths*. But if we come to the reading of God's word, with any vicious prejudice or sinful partiality; not to discover the divine will, but to gratify our own; not to find out the meaning of the Holy Ghost, but our own private sentiments and opinions; even this light may be turned into darkness, and we may lose our way, and follow those paths which lead down to death, while we have in our hands the words of eternal life. And if this be the case; if by any false principles we have taken up, any wrong judgment we have made, any corrupt passion

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or affection we have suffered to prevail over us, we pervert our own reason, and wrest the Scriptures; we have then nothing to guide us, but shall be abandoned to the power of our lusts, and the wiles of the devil. If both the light of nature and revelation be turned into darkness, how great is that darkness!

3. Hence appears the great evil and mischief, both the sin and the guilt, of imposing upon mens understandings, misinforming their judgments, and instilling false notions and principles into their minds: since this is to betray them to a guide that will assuredly mislead them, and instead of conducting them to heaven, will bring them into the pit of destruction.

Many such principles as these are professed and taught by the church of Rome; such as not only make void the commandments of God, and render a virtuous life needless; but such as directly encourage the vilest and most barbarous practices.

With them, confession to a priest; and absolution, to which they are entitled by the mere fear of hell, which they call attrition; are sufficient to salvation.

They have instituted various penances and expiations, whereby men are taught that they may escape the punishment, though they retain the sin; and even these too can be dispensed with at pleasure.

But they have the less reason to invent easier methods of procuring pardon for sin, than repentance and amendment; because they have ways to prevent most sins from being sins, and

even to sanctify vice, and turn it into virtue. If, for instance, the case be that of murder, 'tis but first pronouncing the man to be a schismatic or heretic, and all are such who dissent from them; and then he may be excommunicated and killed, not only without offending God, but even with acceptable service to him.

They teach it to be lawful for a man to act according to a probable opinion: and that with them is probable, which is maintained by any one or more of their celebrated casuists: so that at this rate there is hardly any villany but may be practised, since there is scarce any thing so vile, but what has, amongst them, some to patronize and defend it.

They maintain that a good intention is sufficient to justify any action, and that 'tis lawful to do that which is materially evil, provided we direct the inward intention of our minds to a good and honest end. And what wickedness is there, that such a principle will not justify?

In general, for it would be endless to descend to all particulars; they press men upon an implicit faith of whatever their church teaches, and a blind obedience to whatever their spiritual rulers shall think fit to enjoin. They oblige men to renounce their senses and their reason too, that they may tamely lead them whithersoever they please, and put them upon practices, though never so foul and inhuman, which they shall judge necessary for the good of the catholic cause, i. e. the promoting their own worldly interest and grandeur. And this method of practice seldom fails of the desired effect.

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men wilfully stifle and suppress their own reason and judgment; and resign themselves up to the arbitrary dictates of others, there is nothing which they may not be brought to commit and approve. When the light that is in them is turned into darkness, how great is that darkness! and how dismal will be the effects and consequences of it.

4. And lastly, what has been said, should excite us to endeavour after this single eye, not only as it means in general a sound and impartial judgment, but in that literal sense which has already been hinted, as it imports singleness of mind, the having but one grand purpose and design, one ruling principle and affection, and that is, serving God, and saving our own souls.

We should, as far as is possible, reduce every thing to this single point, not to have two matters to serve, and several chief ends to carry on at the same time; not to have our treasure in two different places, and our happiness placed in contrary things. But to fix ourselves immovably upon the attainment of eternal life and happiness, and to make every thing we do subservient to this end; at least not to suffer any thing to come into competition with it.

This is what our Saviour means, when he tells us, *That no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*, Luke ix. 62. This is that *one thing needful*, which he commends Mary for choosing, while he blames Martha for being *careful and troubled about many things*, Luke x. 41, 42. This also is the design of those parables, where he compares

the kingdom of heaven to a treasure hid in a field, to purchase which a man sells all that he has; and to a pearl of great price, for which the merchant will part with his whole substance. All which intimate and recommend to us the single eye, that one purpose, upon which we ought to fix our minds, and in which all other aims and views should center. While we keep to this, our whole body will be full of light, our actions will be all of a piece, and have an uniform tendency to bring us to those regions of light and bliss, which are inhabited by wise and holy souls. But if we suffer ourselves to be diverted by any thing from this one end, and, while we pretend to pursue it, have our eye fixed upon other designs; our actions will then cross and contradict one another, and we shall be in the utmost darkness and confusion, and shall at last inherit the folly of our choice, and have our portion in that kingdom of darkness, where there is nothing but weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth; the sting of guilt, and the remorse of conscience, the most vexatious shame and reproach, the most bitter anguish and vexation, the worm that never dies, and the fire that cannot be quenched,

S E R M O N V.

**A Discourse on religious Sincerity,
wherein the true marks and tests of
it are fully set forth.**

Preached at Hampton Court, Oct. 15, 1710.

By Bishop A. TTERBURY.

2 COR. xiii. 5.

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith;
prove your own selves.*

TH E R E are three several ranks and orders of men, into which those *that name the name of Christ*, (2 Tim. ii. 15.) and profess his religion, may be divided. Some have nothing more than the mere name and profession of christianity, for in their works they deny it; *being alienated from the life of Christ*, (Ephes. iv. 18.) and paying no manner of obedience to his laws; but living in the open and avowed practice of all kind of pollutions. Others there are, who as manifestly adorn the doctrine they embrace, and live up to the rule which they profess, so far as human infirmity will suffer them.

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They have, by the grace of God concurring with their sincere endeavours, subdued the power of their corrupt lusts and affections, so that little or no disturbance doth from thence arise to them; but they go on in the paths of virtue, and the duties of piety, evenly and regularly; glorifying God, and benefiting men, and *shining more and more unto a perfect day*, Prov. iv. 18. And to each of these the state and condition of their own souls is known certainly and clearly. A strong conviction of guilt terrifies the one, without any offer of excuse, or hope of pardon; and the conscience of the other bears witness to their uprightness, without doubts or misgivings. Between these there is a middle state of men, who are neither notoriously evil, nor yet remarkably virtuous; neither entirely given over to work wickedness, nor yet thoroughly confirmed in goodness; but in a doubtful, uncertain way of living and thinking; sometimes standing firm in virtue, and sometimes failing; sometimes sinning, and sometimes repenting; sometimes hoping, and sometimes desponding.

To such as these the exhortation of the apostle in my text is directed: *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves: that is, consider your condition impartially and thoroughly, try it by the rules of the gospel; satisfy yourselves once for all, whether you be true sincere believers, such as God will accept. If you find that you are, resolve by his grace to continue such to your lives end; if you find, you are not, resolve to make yourselves*

selves such, as soon as is possible. For nothing can be of more moment to you, than this knowledge, and these resolutions; *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*

In order to assist you in this enquiry, it shall be the business of my present discourse to propose some few plain marks, or tests, by which every man, who entertains any doubts of this kind (as very good men sometimes do) may, if he pleases, try his own Sincerity, and fully satisfy himself, whether he be an hearty believer, and a sound member of that body, of which Christ Jesus is the head: whether, and how far he hath obtained the great Christian perfection, which is to recommend all the rest, I mean that of Sincerity.

And, first, The most obvious, and therefore the most satisfying mark of religious Sincerity is, if a man, upon a review of his own thoughts, finds, that his resolutions of obedience are universal and unlimited; without a reserve for any favourite sin, without excepting any particular instance of duty, wherein he desires to be excused. *Then* (saith the good Psalmist) *shall I not be ashamed*, i. e. *then* may I safely confide in my own innocence and uprightness, *when I have respect unto all thy commandments*; when I find myself equally determined to obey every divine precept, and resolved to allow myself in no practice whatsoever, which the law of God doth not allow of. And where this is not the case, there can be no true Christian Sincerity; which consists in a true bent and inclination

inclination of the will towards God; and the will is never truly, but when it is totally inclined towards him; when it is lost, and swallowed up in the divine will; implicitly likes or dislikes, chooses or refuses, what God hath beforehand approved, or disapproved by his holy precepts, or prohibitions. Is a man said to be sincere to his friend, who betrays him in any one important secret, committed to his trust, tho' he should be faithful in many others? Is a servant said to be sincere to his master, who hath any reserved cases, wherein he resolves not to consult his honour, or interest? No more can a man be reckoned sincere towards God, who sets up any single lust, inclination, or thought, against what he knows to be the divine will and pleasure. And this is evidently the reason of that determination in St. James; *Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For (as it there follows) he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law; (Jam. ii. 10, 11.) i. e. if thou neglectest to observe any one divine command, knowing it to be one, thou art in that instance as open, and declared a rebel to the authority enacting it, as if thou shookest off thy obedience to all.*

If then, upon a careful survey of ourselves, we find, that we are, from the bottom of our souls, disposed, and resolved to comply with all the terms of duty (whether grateful, or ungrateful to flesh and blood) which the gospel proposeth to us; that it is our fixt intent not to
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do, in any case, what God hath forbidden, nor to neglect what he hath enjoined; and that there is no appetite, desire, or design so dear to us, but we are ready to part with it, as soon as its opposition to a divine command shall be made out; if this, upon examination, prove to be our case, we have great reason to think well of ourselves, and to conclude, that we are in such a state of mind, as God will accept, and reward.

A second, and sure proof of religious Sincerity may be drawn from a general view of the common course of our lives and actions. If there be an even tenor of goodness visible in our conduct, a regular and steady pursuit of virtue, without any gross and notorious failures in scandalous instances, and flagrant acts of wickedness; if, whenever we happen to fall by some great temptation, we continue not long and quietly under the guilt of it, but recover our ground forthwith, and return to our duty; proceeding on in the paths of obedience and an holy life habitually, and discharging our obligations to God and man pretty evenly and uniformly; then may we from hence also make a comfortable guess at the goodness of our condition in this world, and nourish very promising hopes to ourselves of being happy in another. 'Tis not to be expected, that while we are in the body, we should live altogether free from the stains and infirmities of it. In the very best of men, their passions will sometimes prevail over their reason, and the strongest sense of their duty will give way to a present temptation. A pious
man

man may, now and then, be very cold and languid in the performance of his devotions, and very full of distractions and wanderings. A meek and good man, by some unforeseen accident, and by several conspiring circumstances, may be raised up into an unbecoming pitch of anger and resentment. A temperate man may through importunity, or for want of a due guard over himself, be gradually and insensibly betrayed into some degree of excess. But then, in all these cases, the person falling, quickly comes to himself again; the fit is short, and soon over, and is succeeded immediately by shame and remorse, by new resolutions, and more vigorous endeavours. Consider the man altogether, and you will find, that the general current of his behaviour bears witness to his integrity, though he fail now and then in particular instances. And God, who sees all our actions at once, will judge us upon the whole view, and not single out our worst qualities, without any regard to our best, in order to exercise his severity upon us. Let no man therefore too hastily and too severely condemn himself for frequent infirmities, slips, and neglects; let no man, who would judge aright of his spiritual estate, fix his eye too intently on some particular blemishes and failings, of which perhaps he is conscious; but let him look rather to the main scope and drift of his thoughts, words, and actions; and by that let him try himself, as by the justest measure and standard of sincere goodness. How contrary to this is the conduct of some good and pious souls!

How

How usual is it for persons, well-advanced in piety, when they are making such enquiries as these, to dwell altogether on their defects and miscarriages, without regarding the regular course of a virtuous and well-ordered life; and to condemn themselves as false and insincere, because they are not perfect and sinless? God forbid, that these should be the terms, upon which we are to be dealt with! For where then would be the man upon earth, who could undergo the scrutiny? *If thou, Lord, shouldst be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?* Ps. cxxx. 3.

A third sign and test of Sincerity is, if a man be not content with any determined proportion of goodness, nor willing to sit down at such a point of virtue, as he hath already attained, without aiming at a further degree of increase and proficiency. For *the path of the just is as the shining light*, says the wise man, (Prov. iv. 18.) *shining more and more unto a perfect day*: that is, the truly good are always aiming to be better, and how far soever they have run in the race of virtue, still urge on-ward incessantly and eagerly; *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, they press towards the mark for the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Phil. iii. 12. A soul truly touched with the sense of its own sins and unworthiness, and of the infinite mercies and condescensions of God towards us, will never stint and bound itself in its returns; but will endeavour to love as much, and to obey as far as is possible. Let its attainments

ments be what they will, yet it knows, that they are short, extremely short of its obligations; that the measures of grace, which we arrive at here, are only earnestts and spurs, and helps towards larger communications, and higher improvements; and therefore that a man is never so good as he ought to be, who doth not heartily desire, and design to be as good as he can be; and breathe and pant after perfection itself, even in this life, though he be satisfied, that it is not fully attainable, but in another; since withal he is satisfied, that the more uniformly and vigorously he presses toward the mark of perfection in this life, the nearer still shall he approach to it, tho' he shall never reach it; and the nearer he is towards reaching it here, the more glorious shall be his crown, and the more exalted his state of perfection hereafter. And therefore, if any one find himself inclined to circumscribe his practice within such or such limits of duty, beyond which he never intends, nor expects to go; to hold fast the pleasures of life, and to enjoy as much of them as ever he can, consistently with the principles of religion; arguing always for the utmost extent of his Christian liberty, and desiring to make his obligations as narrow as may be; such an one hath reason to conclude, that he is as yet short of those qualifications, which are necessary to recommend him to the judge of all hearts, and discerners of spirits.

A fourth mark or test by which a man may discover, whether he be sincerely religious, or not, is, to examine himself, whether he
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be as inclinable to exercise the graces and virtues of the Christian life in private, as in public; without doing any thing merely for the applause or fear of men; but under a conscientious regard to him, that *seeth in secret*, and under an expectation that he, who *seeth in secret*, will, at the great day of account, *reward him openly*. Matt. vi. 18. For example, let a man consider, whether he be as punctual and exact in performing his closet-devotion, as in repairing to the public offices of the church, and as uneasy under the omission of the one, as the other; and when he prays in private, whether he be as composed, and reverend, and devout in his behaviour, as he is, when the eyes of a great assembly are upon him. Again, as to points of mercy, generosity, and justice, let him reflect, whether he be as ready to give alms in private, as in the streets; to defend the cause of the injured and oppressed, and to support a good man's reputation, in such circumstances, when he is sure never to hear of it again, as he would be, if all the world heard and observed him. Finally, whether he be as loth to defraud his neighbour in a great matter, or a small, when he might do it securely, without fear of a discovery; as he should be, if he were sure to be arraigned in a court of judicature for it. He that can truly answer these questions to his own satisfaction, hath no great reason to distrust his Sincerity; and he who cannot, hath as little reason to depend upon it.

Hypocrisy, when in perfection, will act real goodness so well, and put on the shape and

disguise of it so exactly, as to deceive even him who plays the part, as well as those who look on, and create a belief in him that he is what he seems to be; till he compares himself with himself, his private with his public conduct: and that touchstone never fails to distinguish true from counterfeit piety; for the surest indications of mens characters are those actions and discourses which flow from them, when they are off of their guard, and under no awe, or restraint from the eyes and observations of others.

A fifth thing, by which Sincerity in religion manifests itself, is, when a man appears to act, not out of bye-aims, and a private interest, but out of a true zeal for the honour of God, the interest of virtue, and the good of mankind. Would you satisfy yourself, whether you sincerely love such a relation, such an acquaintance, such a friend? Consider, do you on all occasions design to promote what is for their service and reputation? do you heartily desire and endeavour their good, without having an immediate eye on your own advantage in it? If you do; 'tis certain that your friendship and affection are sincere; for no man can give better proofs and assurances of it. And the case is the same with respect to God and religion. If a man feels himself inwardly warmed and acted by a true concern for the glory of God, for the honour of his name, and of his worship; if he be apt to undervalue worldly regards, and petty private views, in comparison of this great end; if in evil days, when the
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manners of men are extremely corrupted, he is not ashamed to act up to strict principles of virtue, which are not in fashion, nor is remiss in the practice of those duties, which he foresees, will scarcely turn to account; espousing firmly and unalterably the cause of God, and goodness, even when hundreds on his right hand have gone off, and thousands have revolted on his left: in a word, when a man can be loose and sceptical, with the general applause of the world, and cannot be otherwise, without being despised and pitied; and yet is so far from being tempted to a compliance, that he doth what he can to stem the torrent of impiety, and to make his virtue as conspicuous as other mens vices: when a man, I say, doth, upon reflection, find himself thus resolved and qualified, he hath great reason to be pleased with his condition, and to conclude, that it is well pleasing to God also: for there is no surer mark of integrity, than a courageous adherence to virtue, in the midst of a general and scandalous apostasy. Which is the reason that Noah and Abraham, Lot and Daniel, have so high an encomium bestowed on them in Scripture, and are recommended as patterns of a strict, uncompromising uprightness, to all succeeding ages. Further,

Sixthly, It is no slight token of our Sincerity in religion, if we are apt to suspect it, on the account of little things; which is often the case of very devout Christians, and who have really the least occasion to mistrust themselves, of any men. Persons of a nice and

tender conscience, very careful to please God, and very fearful of offending him, are for that very reason, prone to imagine that they fall infinitely short of their duty, if they do not, in every respect, exactly discharge it; and to disquiet themselves on this account, with many groundless scruples and terrors. Sometimes, the principle, from whence their repentance sprang, gives them great uneasiness; for they remember, that the reformation of heart and life, in which they are now well advanced, began at first, not from a true and ardent love of God, but from the mere dread of punishment. Sometimes their unequal performance of religious duties dejects, and dispirits them; they find themselves cold, and unmoved, when they are upon their knees; in the most solemn and raising parts of the service, and even at the reception of the blessed sacrament itself, they do not feel an holy warmth kindling in their hearts, nor their mind melting under the impressions that are then made upon it: and they conclude therefore, that there is a vein of hypocrisy running through all these performances, which makes them worthless, and unacceptable. Now these, and such as these, I say, are, for the most part, the doubts and misgivings of the sincerely good and pious; for they are such as seldom trouble the consciences of men of a different character: and therefore those very scruples, which disturb good Christians so much, would, if rightly understood, give them matter of sound comfort and encouragement; their very doubts concerning the goodness of
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their state, are, if they had but the heart to think so, a sure reason why they should not doubt of it. Let not then the true saints and servants of God perplex and afflict themselves with such difficulties; let them not give up religion, by their means, to the laughter and scorn of profane men, who, from a few such instances as these, take pleasure to represent it, as residing only in weak brains, as the employment of melancholy and diseased minds; and who stick not, in the gaiety of their hearts, to say, that a strict piety is good for nothing but to make the owners of it troublesome to themselves, and useless to the rest of the world. O, let not any one, who wishes well to goodness, disserve the interest of it more, by his unreasonable scruples, than he promotes it, by his exemplary practice! But let him resolve to summon up all his reasoning powers, and to set them in array against these insignificant phantasms and illusions, which would certainly retire before this single reflection (had a man but the courage to make and to believe it) that such niceties dwell usually there, where there is least need of them, and are a real sign of that sincere piety, the want of which those, who thus unhappily suffer under them, deplore.

Seventhly. Another sure token of our Sincerity in religion is, when we delight to read the holy Scriptures, and have a savory taste and relish of them; when we find somewhat more in them than in mere human writings, and are apt to settle into a pious composure of mind while we are perusing them. When we come

to them with satisfaction and eagerness, and are uneasy under any long discontinuance of our conversation with them. This is the token and character, by which the experienced Psalmist teaches us to know a good man. *His delight (saith he) is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.* Psal. i. 2. 'Tis true, it may sometimes happen, that a person of a sound and sincere piety shall read the holy Scriptures, without being much warmed, or affected with them. He may be under an indisposition and languour of mind; the business, or pleasures of life, and worldly objects, may now and then take possession of his heart, and shut the door against spiritual impressions; but then this is not a common and every day's case; he is for the most part well disposed and affected towards this divine employment; his appetite is generally awakened, and his taste very good; *and he rejoiceth in God's word, as one that findeth great spoils;* Psal. cxix. 162. *Did not our heart burn within us (said the good disciples) while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?* Luke xxiv. 32. But if a man can frequently peruse those sacred pages, without any degree of sensible emotion and concern, without being touched any ways by the matter of them, or awed by the majestic manner of expression, which distinguishes them from all other writings; this is as sure an indication of a sick soul, as a palate, which does not relish the most savory meats, is of a diseased body. *The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the word of God trieth the hearts;* Prov. xvii.

xvii. 3. *And it is quick and powerful (saith the author to the Hebrews) and sharper than any two-edged sword; piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; Heb. iv. 12. And needs must that heart be very hard and callous, and almost past feeling, upon which so pungent and searching a medicine doth not operate.*

These are the several marks or tests, by which we may examine ourselves, whether we are in the faith, whether we are possessed of that truly Christian Sincerity which God above all things requires. Let us do it honestly and impartially; let us apply the rules which have been given, and take an estimate of the true state and condition of our souls, by the means of them. If, upon a strict enquiry, we find, that our hearts are right with God; let us give him the praise, and resolve by his grace and blessing; to keep them so, *all the while our breath is in us, and the Spirit of God is in our nostrils; Job xxvii. 3. and endeavour to grow in this faith, and to increase in this grace, more and more, till we come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, Ephes. iv. 13. But if, after a serious review of our lives and consciences, it appears, that they are not such as will strictly bear the test; let us form immediate resolutions of working ourselves up into those degrees of Sincerity which we want, and of being as*

holy and blameless, as we ought to be, in all manner of conversation. 1 Pet. i. 5.

May we every one of us so resolve, and be blessed in God's good time, with an happy and comfortable effect of our resolutions, through the mighty assistances of his Holy Spirit, purchased for us by the blood of his dear Son! To which eternal Three be for ever ascribed all honour, adoration and praise. Amen.

S E R M O N VI

Christian Fortitude.

By Dr. EVANS.

2 PETER i. 5. former part.

And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue.

CHRISTIANITY encourages us to lay aside a slavish fear of the great God; and much more obliges us to get above a cowardly fear of men. Nor is any thing more necessary to our acquitting ourselves well in our course of obedience to our heavenly father, than courage and undaunted resolution: which I apprehend the apostle here to recommend.

He supposes those to whom he wrote, to have obtained like precious faith with him and the other apostles, ver. i. i. e. to believe the gospel, as well as they. After this character given them in the inscription, we have the usual apostolical salutation; a prayer, that *grace and peace might be multiplied to them*. On this occasion he enlarges on the happy state they were brought into by the gospel, the great and

and good things given them and promised to them in Christ, for this purpose, that they might be wrought up to a divine temper and life. Hereupon he immediately proceeds to exhort them to give all diligence in building a proper superstructure upon their belief of the gospel. That which he recommends, consists of seven important articles. The first mentioned, and which he immediately connects with faith, is virtue. *Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue.*

Some would understand Virtue in a general sense, for an universal regularity of mind and manners, or a disposition to all virtuous actions. So Peter's exhortation would fall in with that of another apostle, Tit. iii. 8. *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works.* But this general sense seems not so natural here, because all the following particulars reckoned here, except knowledge, are comprehended in Virtue taken in this large sense: *temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity.* The answer which some give to this reason, seems not satisfactory; that the apostle first recommends virtue in general, and then some principal parts and branches of it: for by the manner of expression it is imported, that every one of them signifies a distinct excellence, something additional to what had gone before. Add one to the other.

Therefore I take the word Virtue in a more limited sense, to mean the particular disposition of Christian Fortitude. So the word *ἀρετή* is

is often taken in Greek writers, and *virtus* by the Latins. This sense seems to agree best with the context. What could more naturally be pressed upon us after faith, or a belief of the gospel, than courage in the profession of it, and in a practice correspondent to it? And what could more aptly follow upon this, than that we should *add to our virtue or courage, knowledge?* or a growing acquaintance with the doctrines and duties contained in the rule of our faith, that our courage and resolution may not be ill placed?

The truth then, which I am now to insist upon, is this,

That Christian courage and Fortitude is a temper of mind, very necessary to be found in all true believers.

Here it will be my endeavour to shew, I. The nature of this Christian grace. And, II. What may be intended in the exhortation to add it to our faith.

I. I am to explain the nature of this grace of Christian Courage or Fortitude.

Courage in general is a temper which disposes a man to do brave and commendable actions, without being daunted at the appearance of dangers and difficulties in the way. The heathen moralists reckoned bravery in war to be the highest expression of courage, and that a soldier had the greatest opportunity to shew courage; because life, the dearest thing in this world, is risked in war. Thus the Christian life being a warfare, gives the principal occasion and opportunity to shew Christian courage.

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It is nothing else but to behave as *good soldiers of Jesus Christ*, 2 Tim. ii. 3. to adhere to Christ, and to continue in the discharge of Christian duty, in the view of the greatest discouragements and hazards.

To explain it more particularly, it may be proper to shew, 1. For what Christian courage is to be exercised. 2. Against what it is to be exerted. And, 3. In what acts and instances it should be expressed.

1. For what it is to be exercised.

For the cause makes it a Christian grace. It is courage in Christ's cause; that is, in maintaining the profession of the Christian faith, and adhering to the practice of our duty, as far as we are convinced of the mind of God; so as not to deny a known truth, or admit the least sin, upon any consideration whatsoever. This is *warring a good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience*, to which Timothy is exhorted, 1 Tim. i. 18, 19. These are the two things which Christian Fortitude is concerned to hold fast, and not to suffer either to be wrested away.

But it must necessarily be presupposed, that we are careful to inform ourselves well about the mind and will of God, relating both to faith and practice; that our courage may not be blind and rash, without a good foundation to support it. Otherwise for ought we know, we may be *contending earnestly for error*, instead of *the faith once delivered to the saints*; or for the mere precepts of men, or our own humours, instead of the commands of God. This will
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not be esteemed by God Christian courage, but mad rashness, if we have not made a careful inquiry into the doctrines and duties of our religion. Though we should chance to be in the right, yet if we have not arrived at a conviction of this upon conscientious and impartial examination according to our capacities and opportunities, the most resolute adherence will not be a Christian virtue; because in the course we have taken, we might have chanced as well to be in the wrong.

And indeed, without such diligent inquiries, we are hardly like to be courageous in an hour of trial. Whatever resolution we may seem to have, while difficulties are at a distance; yet the actual approach of sufferings and strong temptations will search our foundations: and we shall scarce withstand resolutely *in an evil day, and having done all, stand*, unless we have good evidence, that we are contending for divine truth, or *striving against sin*.

It is therefore of the utmost concern to us, as ever we would have our courage acceptable or abiding, that we have solid grounds for the persuasions we admit in religion, or the word of God indeed on our side. Then our resolution will be truly Christian, and it is like to be proof against the greatest difficulties.

2. Against what Christian courage is to be exercised.

It supposes oppositions, trials and dangers in our way; else there would be no occasion for it. It is a temper for which there will be no room in heaven; and the need of it now, ariseth

eth from our present condition as in a state of conflict. Some indeed meet with greater trials of their courage than others do; but all have some, and none can certainly promise themselves an exemption even from the greatest. Now all that hath a tendency to awaken a Christian's fear of danger in his course of faith and obedience, gives opportunity to exercise his courage: whether it be apt to excite fear of present sufferings for his fidelity, or of his final success. And so we may observe,

(1.) The power, the subtilty and activity of the powers of darkness call for courage in a Christian. Upon this the apostle founds an exhortation to *be strong or courageous*, Eph. vi. 10, 12. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, weak or visible enemies only; but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* Number, policy, strength, unwearied application in enemies, are each of them trials of the courage of a soldier; and especially when they are all united. A little soul is affrighted and disheartned at them. If they have had success in former assaults, the discouragement is still greater. But all these things whet the courage of the brave.

These things all meet in the case of a Christian. He is entered upon a warfare with evil spirits; who are invisible, and therefore the more apt to gain advantage at unawares: who are many in number, and therefore able to find him full employment: of the most refined skill and subtilty, furnished with great capacities

ties of nature, and grown old in experience; and therefore very likely to beguile: of the most implacable and desperate malice, who vow our ruin, if they can accomplish it: restless and incessant in their pernicious endeavours; *going about continually, seeking whom they may devour*, 1 Pet. v. 8. And every one of us is conscious, that they have had too frequent success against us already, as they have actually slain their thousands. Such enemies will find work for our courage, to resist them, notwithstanding all these threatening circumstances of danger, ver. 9.

(2.) The oppositions from within ourselves require courage. Our own irregular inclinations, and affections, and passions are difficult to be overcome: in some temptations they are particularly violent, they have sometimes been successful against our best resolutions; and after a long warfare, most feel them to retain a considerable power, and gain not such a conquest as they desire. All these things are very apt to dishearten. And if we add, that all our struggles with these domestic enemies, and all the ground we gain from them, is offering a sort of violence to ourselves, like the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye; the trial occasioned thereby to our Fortitude and courage, will appear very considerable.

(3.) The several discouragements or dangers we may meet with from other men, in the way of our duty, and even for our duty, make courage necessary. Solomon tells us, that *the fear*
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of man bringeth a snare, Prov. xxix. 25. Courage is to overcome this snare.

All Christians have warning even to prepare for martyrdom; to be ready to *resist unto blood, striving against sin*; to *take up the cross*, though they should be called to bear it in the literal sense. This they must be determined to do, rather than deny any thing which they believe to be a truth, or comply with any known sin. God sometimes leaves even the lives of his servants at the mercy of their most cruel enemies; and then they may have no choice left, but either to forsake Christ or their lives. And notwithstanding our long ease and enjoyment of the liberty of our consciences; notwithstanding the gracious indulgence and protection of the present government; yet in the uncertainty of human affairs, none of us can be sure, that we shall escape even the fiery trial. We could expect no better, should God ever suffer the bigotry of Rome to possess the throne of these kingdoms; which may he of his infinite mercy always prevent: for we know, that when that sort of people kill us for our supposed heresy, they think that they do God good service. Now here is Christian courage, if we should be called to lose our lives for the testimony of Jesus, *not to be moved with these things, nor to count our lives dear unto ourselves, so that we may finish our course with joy. Acts xx. 24.*

This is the utmost that man can do, to kill the body: but beside that, there are many lower sufferings for righteousness sake, which require

Fortitude

Fortitude to bear them; the loss of substance, or liberty, or friends, or reputation. We may lie open to the tryal of cruel mockings and reproaches, when enemies are restrained from doing more; and these are some trials of resolution to an ingenuous mind.

Or even to descend lower; it is a point of courage, especially to some tempers, to be singular, or to act contrary to the common stream of practice; to be obliged by our sentiments to go against the advice and importunity of friends; to differ in points of conduct from many wise and good men, whom we highly esteem and value. And yet a good man may sometimes find himself necessitated to run counter to his dearest associates, and even to *withstand them to the face*, Gal. ii. 11. while he studies to approve himself to God.

It yet remains, for explaining Christian courage, that it be shewn,

3. Wherein, or in what acts and instances it should express itself.

Insensibleness of difficulties or dangers is not a proper expression of it. It is not expected of a Christian, that his apprehension of these things should be less quick than other people's, or that he should have no natural reluctancy to them. Without that, they would be no trial of his courage.

Nor are we to expose ourselves unnecessarily to dangers. We should exercise courage in conjunction with Christian prudence, though it ought not to be under the restraints of carnal policy. It is Christian prudence not to run

upon danger, farther than plain duty obliges us. I cannot say, that it is always mens duty to profess every particular opinion they entertain to all the world: in some cases that rule holds, *Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God*, Rom. xiv. 22. The preservation of the peace of the church, and their own safety, may justify them in it. But it is always our duty not to deny or profess the contrary to that which we believe, though at the greatest peril. It would rather be imprudence than duty, to act in time of persecution, as some primitive Christians did, who ran uncalled to the heathen tribunals, and cried, "I am a Christian," on purpose that they might obtain the honour and reward of martyrdom. It is sufficient, if we are ready to hold fast our profession, when the providence of God calls us out to the conflict; if we are willing to bear any temporal evil for our faithfulness, rather than be false to Christ and a good conscience, when we must chuse the one or the other. It is delivered as an ordinary rule by Christ himself to his disciples, when he foretels the persecutions that would await them, Mat. x. 23: *When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.* Though circumstances may sometimes vary the case, and make even this inconsistent with duty. Nehemiah was so situated: when the whole work of repairing the state of the Jews, after the captivity, depended under God upon his presence with the people; though he was apprized of attempts against him by the common enemy, yet in such circumstances, says he, *Should such a man as I flee?* Nehem.

Nehem. vi. 11. And the like may occur in the case of others: which good men must judge of for themselves, as they fall out, and by which those who are thoroughly devoted to God will govern themselves. The ordinary rule is as hath been mentioned.

But Christian courage is to exert itself in such ways as these.

(1.) In deliberate and vigorous resolutions for God and our duty, upon counting the cost. This is all that can be done, when difficulties and dangers are not actually present; seriously to consider them, and upon balancing matters, to determine for a firm adherence to our Master, whatever it may cost us. It is true, we may deceive ourselves in this courage at a distance, and after resolutions that seemed bold and brave, betray shameful cowardice in the conflict. The disciples were a sad instance of this: their resolution for Christ seemed firm, and certainly they thought it so themselves. *Peter said to him, Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended,* Matt. xxvi. 33. In ver. 35. he seemed to consider the very worst that could befall him, and from that particular view to add new vigour to his resolution. *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.* Likewise also said all the disciples. And yet we know, Peter soon shamefully denied him, and all the rest forsook him and fled. Such an instance may justly be a loud admonition against confidence in ourselves, for performing good resolutions in our own strength; and against trusting to them

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when we have made them, without continued watchfulness and recollection: one or both of which seem to have been the faults of the disciples, and the reason of their ill success. But their miscarriage after laudable resolves, should by no means divert us from forming such purposes. Christ himself recommends them to all his followers. When he had stated the terms of being his disciples, he plainly intimates the folly and danger of setting out in profession, without weighing those terms, and a full determination to go through, Luke xiv. 26—30. The same thing Barnabas inculcated upon the church of Antioch; he *exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord*, Acts xi. 23. Such a noble ardour in Paul was a bright part of his character, when he could say, *I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*, Acts xxi. 13.

(2.) In the suppression of distracting fear of evils at a distance. The coward often fears, where no fear is; and, as well as the slothful man, creates to himself many imaginary dangers: *There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets*, Prov. xxii. 13. and represents real ones with a much more formidable aspect than they have in themselves. His spirits sink at the prospect. Fortitude has a very contrary effect. The brave soldier of Christ does not anxiously *take thought about to-morrow*, but leaves future events to God's ordering. *He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid*, Psal. cxii. 7, 8.

(3.)

(3.) In a vigorous application to our Christian work, notwithstanding the stated and constant difficulties and oppositions attending it. Though Satan would hinder, and the world ensnare, and a corrupt heart resist, a courageous Christian goes on as one resolved to conquer or die; *striving to enter in at the strait gate*, Luke xiii.

24. Maintaining an unwearied conflict with his spiritual enemies, where-ever they oppose him in his great design. If he is sometimes foiled, yet he returns to his warfare, and strenuously endeavours to gain the ground he has lost. And if still he hath not the success he wishes for, yet he resolves to preserve and never to quit the field, till his warfare is accomplished. Such a man answers the character given by our Saviour of the heirs of heaven, Matt. xi. 12. *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

(4.) In a readiness to undertake hard and difficult services, when God calls to them. Such as may be eminently for the honour of God or the advantage of our generation, though we may foresee few to help us, and many to oppose us; though we must reckon upon numerous and formidable adversaries, and reproaches possibly from good and bad men too; though the business we are employed in may be unacceptable to the most. Holy Fortitude is necessary to dispose men to come to the help of the Lord against the mighty; when popular mistakes are to be opposed; when iniquity comes in like a flood, and God seems to call out, *Who will rise up for me against the evil doers? Who will*

will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? Psal. xciv. 16. Or when duty obliges us to go upon an ungrateful errand; as when God was about to pronounce the sorest judgments upon the Jews, and said in the hearing of the prophet Isaiah, *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* Then said I, *here am I, send me*, Isa. vi. 8. And especially, when visible dangers await us, not to decline a service of which we are capable, is an act of illustrious courage for God: as Moses bravely pursued the design of delivering Israel out of Egypt, till he had accomplished it, *not fearing the wrath of the king*, Heb. xi. 27.

(5.) In an uniform steadiness of conduct under all the trials we actually meet with. It is no great expression of courage in common life, to talk big when dangers are remote; those are most apt to do so, who behave worst in time of trial: but cool courage and steadiness, as men are called out to action, is the most valuable thing. So it is in a Christian. If he quits not his post, forsakes not his God, makes not shipwreck of faith or of a good conscience, when he is called to suffer for his fidelity; this is indeed the Christian hero. Though he should have had more fears beforehand how he might behave, than some more confident men; tho' he should meet suffering with a trembling heart; yet if he stands his ground in the hour of temptation, he has the truest courage. As it hath been observed of some of the bravest soldiers, they have come with a trembling hand into the battle, but when once engaged, have done

done wonders. This should be the great care of every one of us in an hour of trial, that we betray no known truth, and admit no known sin, whatever temporal good we lose, and whatever evil we suffer thereby: and to continue thus stedfast from one trial to another; that Fortitude may be our habitual temper, and not merely occasional. And if we can maintain serenity and chearfulness under trials, if we can rejoice in tribulation; so much the more will Christian courage have its perfect work.

II. I am farther to shew what may be intended in the exhortation to *add virtue*, or courage, *to our faith*.

This may intimate the imperfection of our faith without this superstructure upon it. It is necessary to be added to our faith, in order to our acceptance with God. We must *confess with the mouth*, as well as *believe in our hearts the Lord Jesus*, if we would *be saved*, Rom. x. 9. Faith is dead, if it produce not a correspondent profession and course of action. Without this, we may ourselves justly question the sincerity of it, and cannot recommend it effectually to others; for without Fortitude we cannot perform and execute the noble dictates of so divine a principle.

But that which I principally apprehend to be designed, is, to intimate the just reason which our faith gives for Christian courage. When we are called to make this addition, we are only required to build the most proper and natural structure upon our most holy faith. The Fortitude required by the gospel, is distinguished from

from all other Fortitude, not only as it is upon account of the truths and duties of Christianity, but as it is founded upon Christian principles. Christian faith is most fit to inspire with Christian Fortitude. For instance,

1. Faith discovers divine providence as engaged for us and with us in all our difficulties. God frequently animated his servants under the Old Testament in hard services, by an assurance of his presence. *Fear not, for I am with thee*, Gen. xxvi. 24. Isa. xli. 10. The three Jewish youths considered him as *able to deliver them*, when Nebuchadnezzar ordered them to be cast into the fiery furnace, Dan. iii. 17. and therefore, like the Jewish nurses in Egypt, *they were not afraid of the king's commandment*. Faith will support us in the greatest dangers by this reasoning, *If God be for us, who can be against us?* Rom. viii. 31. *He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee: so that we may boldly say in the way of our duty, The Lord is my belp, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*, Heb. xiii. 5, 6. nor yet what devils can do; for *greater is he that is in us, and with us, than he that is in the world*, 1 John iv. 4.

2. Faith proposes the divine Spirit, as directly provided to help our infirmities. Particularly for this very purpose, to inspire us with needful courage. So the apostle prays for the Ephesians, *that God would grant them to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man*, Eph. iii. 16. i. e. animated with proper courage in their Christian course. Agreeable to that antient promise, Psal. xxvii. 14. *Wait on the*
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the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; i. e. maintain your trust in God, and so set yourselves vigorously to go on in the way of your duty, and you shall find his confirming grace still more to corroborate and animate you.

3. Faith represents our main enemies as already vanquished, and as having their chief power broken. The captain of our salvation hath personally overcome them, and as the head of the church too: *Having spoiled principalities and powers, which he did by the efficacy of his death, he made a shew of them openly; triumphing over them in it, or rather, in himself, by his resurrection and ascension leading captivity captive, Col. ii. 15.* This is a strong encouragement, not only after his example, but under his banner, to fight the good fight against them. And to the same encouragement he directs us himself with reference to the world and the evils of it; *Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world, John xvi. 33.* Hence the intention of God in sending his Son is represented to be, *that we should be saved from our enemies, Luke i. 71. and then, ver. 74, 75. That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.*

4. Faith gives us particular assurance, that our trials shall not exceed our strength; either the strength we have, or that which shall be imparted, *1 Cor. x. 13. God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are*

are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

5. Faith sets in view greater evils to be feared from our cowardice, than can be feared from our adherence to God. Christ elegantly sets these the one over against the other, Luke xii. 4, 5. *I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that, have no more that they can do. They cannot go so far without divine permission, but it is certain that is doing their worst. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, who can do that and more too; who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.* And this we are fairly warned will be their lot, who cowardly turn their backs, after they have seemed to engage in the Christian warfare. If we should *draw back*, it must be unto perdition; God's soul will have no pleasure in us, Heb. x. 38, 39. And the fearful, who chose always to be in the rear in danger, stand in the front of those who *shall have their part in the second death*, Rev. xxi. 8. One would think this necessity, and the impossibility of escaping without it, should make even a coward to fight. On the other hand,

6. Faith assures us of the certain and glorious success of our courage. That our endeavours against our powerful enemies shall issue in a full conquest: *The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly*, Rom. xvi. 20. And tho' now a saint, after all his struggles, may have frequent occasion to mourn over the body of death, he may be assured that God will deliver him

him from it through Jesus Christ our Lord, Rom. vii. 24. 25. And death itself, the last enemy shall be destroyed, 1 Cor. xv. 26. And unspeakable rewards shall be the prize of the conquerors. We find promises of glorious recompences in a variety of moving descriptions, made to the seven churches of Asia, in the second and third chapters of the Revelations; but all of them assured only to him that overcometh. We strive for mastery, not as uncertain what we are to obtain by it, but for an incorruptible crown, 1 Cor. ix. 25, 26. If we are stedfast and immovable, we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord, Chap. xv. 58. And the promised rewards are plainly declared to bear a proportion to all the difficulties and dangers we surmount.

7. Faith represents to us the noblest examples of such holy Fortitude upon the same principle. All the excellent of the earth, particularly that noble collection of worthies, whose brave exploits are recorded in Heb. xi. the glorious apostle Paul himself; and above all, the captain of our salvation, who was an illustrious pattern of invincible courage in his work: he feared the face of no man in the course of his ministry; but boldly reprov'd sin and sinners. His enemies could not help owning it, Matt. xxii. 16. *Thou carest not for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men.* He pursued his Father's business, and the instruction of mankind, notwithstanding the unwearied designs of ill men against him; which led some upon his preaching openly at Jerusalem at the feast of tabernacles, to say with admiration, *Is not this he whom*

whom they seek to kill? but he, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing to him, John vii. 25, 26. When some of the Pharisees would have persuaded him to quit the place, where he knew his present duty lay, for fear of Herod, Luke xiii. 31, 32. *Get thee out, and depart hence; for Herod will kill thee; Jesus said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.* He neither quitted his post of service for fear of him; nor declined to send him a sharp reproof, according to his special prophetic commission, for fear of provoking him farther. But especially he shewed the truest Fortitude, when he was called to bear his last testimony to the truth, and witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, sealing it with his blood. In this the apostle calls us to *look to Jesus, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right-hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endureth such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds, Heb. xii. 2, 3.* We are called to consider this pattern of courage, and of the glorious success of it too, to animate us to new vigour in our race.

Upon the whole,

I. Consider this grace of Fortitude, as a matter of the utmost importance in the Christian life. The variety of oppositions and difficulties in our way make it necessary. We shall never make any considerable progress in the divine life

life without it, nor ever do much for God or our generation.

It is indeed more especially necessary in some stations: as in magistrates. Great things depend upon their vigour, when they, like Asa, *take courage and put away the abominations* in a land, 2 Chron. xv. 8. And in ministers, who have peculiar occasion *with all boldness to speak the word*, Acts iv. 29. *to speak the gospel boldly, as they ought to speak*, Eph. vi. 20. But it is necessary in every station: to *resist the devil*, whom we have all in common for an enemy, 1 Pet. v. 9. and to *overcome the world*, to which every man is obliged, and which no man can successfully do, without a vigour of resolution.

It is eminently necessary in some duties. As for instance, in reproofing and endeavouring to reform sinners. But almost every duty will at one time or other require it.

It is comparatively more necessary in some periods of time and circumstances of life, than in others. As, in times of persecution, or of the uncommon prevalence of sin and profaneness. But the best times on earth will furnish us with some occasions for it.

It was a proper disposition for a saint in every dispensation of the church. It was often inculcated under the Old Testament: *Fear not; be strong and of good courage*. But it is eminently suitable to a saint in the evangelical state, wherein we have much stronger motives to it. For as the apostle says, 2 Tim. i. 7. *God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*. He has given us

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no occasion for a cowardly temper, but the greatest reason for a courageous spirit.

2. Cultivate therefore your faith, in order to the forming of your minds to holy Fortitude. Frequently contemplate the establishing motives of the gospel, which are so full and apposite; and by prayer and frequent reviews of the grounds of your faith, endeavour to confirm your hope in the gospel.

3. Use all farther additional means to fortify your minds. Be prepared for the worst, by counting frequently the cost. Make clear the goodness of your cause, for which you may be called to exert your courage. Make sure of the goodness of your state, and carefully exercise a good conscience: without this, the best cause in profession will be very faintly maintained in an evil day; because the gospel so fully assures us, that an assertion of the clearest and most important truth contained in it, will not be a sufficient passport for heaven, without real goodness and a general sincerity of heart.

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S E R M O N VII.

The Inadvertencies and Indiscretions of
good men, a great cause of general
corruption in Society.

Preached January 7, 1746-7. Being the day
appointed by his Majesty for a General Fast.

By the Rev. Mr. BUSH.

I T I M. chap. v. part of the 22d verse.

Neither be partaker of other mens sins.

WE have been frequently summoned by
public authority, to join in these be-
coming acts of national piety, during the pro-
gress and different aspects of the present war;
and each occasion has had its particular event
of importance in view, which properly called
for so general and united an application to the
great God. But upon some accounts this may
be considered as more serious, more solemn, and
affecting, than any we have hitherto been engag-
ed in. We are at length drawing near to an
event, which will probably prove the crisis of
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that long and unhappy contention, into which we have been unavoidably drawn by the enemies of our peace and liberty; an event, on the issue of which this great point will most likely be decided—Whether we are to accept of peace on the hard terms, which a conquering, insulting, enemy shall prescribe, or maintain our freedom, and dignity, as Britons; or, in other words, whether we shall any longer live a free, and independent people, enjoying our religion and properties, under the mild and fatherly government of the best of Kings, or hold them at the will and under the encroaching restraints of a foreign tyrant. With such a prospect before us, we may well lift up our eyes towards God, and earnestly seek his favour, on whose secret blessing, victory and success depend.

In this situation the apparent equity and goodness of the cause we are engaged in, no less than that of vindicating the liberties of mankind, might naturally inspire us with encouraging, hopes, and from thence we might strengthen our faith in the righteousness, power, and mercy of God. But there is another consideration to be brought into the account, which suggests suspicion and dread, rather than confidence and hope, I mean our deserts. That they are to be attended to by us, that they will be regarded of God, and influence his dealings with us, cannot be questioned. For, though a cause be good, and may finally prevail, yet they, in whose hands it is intrusted, may in the mean time be severely punished and brought low for their own sins; so the divine conduct in many instances,

instances, both in former and later ages, has shewn us. And surely, if we look into ourselves, we must acknowledge that a scene very dark and discouraging rises up in view. The particulars of our ingratitude, impieties, and growing corruptions have often, on these occasions, been laid open to us; and would to God, there was not still such ample room for a copious enlargement on this melancholy subject. It is from hence our fears spring; it is owing to the continuance of our grievous provocations, that, when we consider God, we are yet afraid of him, and our flesh trembleth for fear of his judgments.

To remove or lessen this great evil, is the proper end of fasting and humiliation; and so we have been oftentimes seasonably admonished in public on these returning solemnities. But how is this to be done? How or where is it to be expected that the good work of reformation should begin and be set forward? What are the secret springs that must be set on work, in order to accomplish such a change, as shall brighten up our hopes, and give us any well-grounded confidence in God? It is not to be expected merely from general declamations upon the degeneracy of the times, or from general admonitions only; nor are we to look for the beginnings of it from those amongst whom reformation is indeed most visibly wanting. If they are amended, it must be by the influence and example of those who are more thoughtful and wise, and of better principles and dispositions than themselves. When a torrent of wicked-

ness rises high, and becomes formidable, it is to little purpose to declaim upon its danger, or to inveigh against those, who immediately and openly countenance it: to abate its power and alluage its violence, the proper method to be taken, is either to purify, or turn off those secret and hidden springs whereby it has been fed, and raised to this dangerous height. We may then hope, that the stream will gradually clear itself, or decline and waste away; otherwise all attempts to stop it, though applied with never so much zeal and diligence, will be unavailable; it will still rage and threaten destruction.

Now, if we trace up the national irreligion to its various fountains, perhaps we shall find none of more pernicious influence, none which has contributed more largely to the increase of it, than what has flowed from a quarter, whence it would be least suspected to come. Judgment often begins at the house of God, and the cause of judgments upon the rest of the world, frequently rises from thence too. It is seldom that national irreligion increases to an unusual degree, but when it has received strength from some particular corruptions, neglects, or culpable indiscretions amongst the better sort of men. Perhaps this has been the case with us. Vice and impiety have therefore kept their obstinate hold, because they have really received a secret accession of strength from those, who are professedly their avowed enemies.

This is certainly a matter deserving of most serious enquiry; for if it should be found, that the growing degeneracy of the age is, in a considerable

siderable degree, owing to some such cause, it is to be hoped, that good men will find it more in their power to remove this great evil, than they imagined; and their disposition to do it cannot be questioned.

That I might speak the more usefully upon this subject, I have chosen this weighty admonition of the apostle, as having an immediate and particular reference to it, *Neither be partaker of other mens sins.* In the improvement of it to this purpose, I shall,

I. Explain its proper import and meaning, and shew you in general, in what manner the observance or neglect of it must affect the state of religion in any Christian society.

II. I shall take notice of some particular instances, wherein it seems to have been neglected by many Christians of worth and character amongst us, and lay open the evil effects of those mistakes and omissions, in which that neglect has been discovered.

III. I shall set before you the many and weighty considerations, which should engage us to the more faithful observance of this important rule of conduct.

I. To explain the importance, and meaning of the words. The admonition or caution itself was delivered (as the passage shews us) to a particular person, and concerning a matter peculiar to the ministerial office; but it was in the view we are now considering it, as a rule of extensive consequence to the esteem and progress of religion in the world. It is subjoined to a precedent caution, in order to shew the weight

and importance of it, which was, That he should *lay hands suddenly on no man*. By the imposition of hands persons were readmitted to the communion of the church, in token of the absolution from those offences, for which they had been formerly excluded from thence. And by the same rite were others ordained to the office of the ministry; it being an outward sign, which God was pleased to accompany with the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost. It was (as it still is) of considerable consequence to the interest of religion, that none should be admitted to either in a hasty manner, and without proper evidence of their fitness for what they were entering upon. By a too easy or undistinguishing admission to the communion of the faithful, bad men might be emboldened to gross impiety, and the church in danger of falling under great reproach from unbelievers. And by a hasty ordination to the ministry many might be encouraged to enter upon that important work, who had neither abilities to support the usefulness or dignity of it, nor perhaps a character to recommend the doctrines, or enforce the duties they inculcated upon others. The apostle therefore subjoins this additional caution, *Neither be partaker of other mens sins*; intimating, that by a precipitate conduct in this particular, Timothy (whose station in the church must often engage him in the work of ordination) might possibly encourage sin in others; and that, in consequence of such indiscretion, he might unwarily involve himself, not only in their guilt with whom he was immediately concerned,

cerned, but in the guilt of multitudes besides, that might be offended at the gospel, through the bad behaviour of persons, who had been so unduly countenanced by him.

Strictly speaking, sin, and guilt which results from it, (in the ordinary course of things) are, and can be personal only; the sin of another therefore can no otherwise defile us, nor can we otherwise partake of its guilt, than as we either join in it, or are accessary to it, or might have, by an obvious precaution, hindered and prevented it. And even in that case, 'tis not so properly his sin, as our own, that defiles us; that is, something faultily done, or omitted by us, which, upon enquiry, shall appear to be owing either to some defect in piety, to irreligious carelessness, or some presumptuous humour in ourselves.

It is a sin in any person to offer himself to the communion of the church, who is conscious of being grossly ignorant in the things of religion, and that his character is really vicious. And that minister of religion shares in the sin of such a one, not who omits unscriptural terms of communion, or to make enquiries, which no man, or church, have any right to make, but who, through irreligious negligence, admits and receives him as a good man, whom an easy, just, and natural enquiry, would have shewn to be a bad one. In like manner, it is doubtless a sin in any person to urge himself upon the office of the ministry, who is conscious of being a real stranger to the grace of God, whose views are merely those of ambition, wealth, or power, and whose

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chief qualifications, instead of sound knowledge and good morals, are visibly empty conceit and a violent attachment to some worldly faction in religion; and certainly they largely share in the guilt of such an one, who hastily ordain him to that important office; they sin against the church of Christ; indeed against the good of mankind in general, by sending out a person to preach the gospel and to promote religion in the world, who in all views of probability must prove rather a discouragement and reproach, than a support and honour to it.

The rule may be applied, and will hold equally good in common instances, and in the ordinary measures and conduct of Christians. Every one has a sphere of influence agreeable to his respective station. There are those, whose spirit and manners will be unavoidably affected by his, and who will receive impressions, either favourable to religion or otherwise, from him. And if his conduct be such as naturally tends to enfeeble the power of religious obligations, and to take off the restraints from licentiousness, profaneness, and criminal folly, he undoubtedly becomes a *partaker of their sins*, who are emboldened to the commission of them by such means. We do not suppose that this is done with design, or that such a person actually joins with others in their vices, so that he cannot in the highest sense be pronounced guilty, but he must be considered as so far involved in their guilt, as, either through his irresolution or negligence, they were left unadmonished, and unrestrained in the measures of iniquity, or, through his indiscretions,

discretions, were encouraged to run into them. The bad influence, which such remissness or imprudence has upon society, will always be in proportion to the degree in which it is indulged by persons of character in the profession of religion. And in what measure it has appeared amongst such, in their ordinary behaviour in life, and consequently, how much the prevalent irreligion of the nation is owing to this cause, they will best judge, who have most carefully observed the spirit and manners of the generality of Christians; — 'tis to be feared, not a little.

The importance of this caution is then to be determined, you see, like that of all others, by the natural effects of observing or neglecting it; and these are such as have a most extensive influence upon the state of religion in the world. While good men preserve the prudence and purity of their own character as consistent Christians, they will, notwithstanding the weaknesses incident to them as men, strike a very powerful awe, and be a restraint upon the licentiousness of those around them; and the natural excellence of their example and manners will not fail, in some measure, to diffuse a spirit of religion through the times in which they live. Consequently, where corruptions have grown to such a height in any society, as to have drawn down visible tokens of divine displeasure, the best remedy of this evil, is, a better spirit, more wisdom and piety; in other words, a reformation amongst those, whose more consistent conduct might have originally prevented it. On the other

hand, it is as evident, that if they, who are *the salt of the earth*, lose their *savour* and seasoning, a general corruption of manners must follow upon it. If they, who are the *light of the world*, cease to diffuse their lustre, no wonder the world around them sinks proportionably into the darkness of vice and profaneness. And in this case the public degeneracy must of necessity rise still higher, and spread itself still wider, as it really receives encouragement from that quarter, from whence should have come it's greatest check and restraint.

What reason there is to suspect this to have been one great cause of that prevalent irreligion amongst ourselves, of which we complain, and from which we fear so much, and consequently what need there is of a more diligent attention to this excellent rule, will appear from what I proposed, which was,

II. To take notice of some particular instances, wherein it seems to have been neglected by many Christians of worth and character amongst us; and to lay open the evil effects of such an unhappy omission.

And here it might perhaps be interpreted as an evidence of partiality in me, should I wholly omit to take notice, how much the state of religion amongst us may have suffered by the neglect of this caution in that important concern, on account of which it was originally given by the apostle, viz. the regulation of the gospel ministry. But this is a subject, which every one must judge of according to his own observations; and which it much better becomes those, who
bear

bear rule in the heritage of God, to think of, than me to enlarge upon. Doubtless, persons in such a station must be fully apprized of how great importance to the power of religion in any Christian nation a well-instructed, pious, exemplary ministry is; and that they are but ill fitted to take care of the souls of others, who live as if they had none of their own.—Certainly, vital godliness is not likely to flourish much in those places, where they, who should be its brightest patterns, discover but too visibly a contempt of it in their ordinary conversation; on the contrary, nothing can be expected but that it should dwindle and pine away under the most fatal discouragements. It cannot be supposed, but that observations of this sort should lay open to those who have the oversight of the flock of God amongst us; and that with every instructive intimation, as well as to other men. And accordingly it may be presumed, that the visible, extensive mischiefs that must accrue to the church of Christ by *laying hands suddenly on any man*, will prevent their becoming *partakers of other mens sins*, by doing it.

But the instances wherein a neglect of this apostolical admonition hath appeared amongst good men in the more common scenes of life, are what I am particularly to take notice of; and in what manner they have contributed to the national irreligion. And that which deserves notice in the first place as a leading step to many others is,

1. A vain affectation of refining the Christian doctrine, under the notion of rendering it
still

still more rational and perfect. Without question it must be confessed to have been a great advantage to the glory of our religion, that, during the many close enquiries which have been lately made into its evidence, at the same time all objections to the truth of it have been fairly answered, its doctrine has been happily purified from many corrupt additions. And, as by this nearer examination, it has been fully discovered, that these, though artfully engrafted upon it, were really no part of it, so the genuine gospel of Christ has appeared in brighter lustre upon their being rejected out of it. It has appeared in all its parts, and in every view, correspondent to the perfections of God, and agreeable to the most improved reason of men. But, with many persons, all this has ended very differently from what might have been expected. Instead of unbelievers coming over to Christianity, many Christians have shewn too great a disposition to go, as far as possible, into the scheme of infidelity; and to render this the more easy, many attempts have been made to bring down the gospel merely to the standard of natural religion; and this shall be styled rendering it more pure and perfect. As if the proper method of doing honour to a revelation, which was intended as an improvement upon natural religion, and to strengthen its engagements by many additional helps and discoveries, was to reject every thing peculiar to it, and to give men to understand, that it contained nothing more than what they did or might know before it was given.

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From hence many Christians, and those otherwise not the least rational and considerate, seem to have been induced to give up with ease some of the most distinguishing doctrines of Christianity. Why else are the great and interesting truths of the sacrifice of Christ's death, as an atonement for sin; of his continual mediation and priesthood; of the assistance of the divine Spirit to the purposes of holiness; and of a particular providence; either totally discarded by many, or solved away into mere figure or metaphor? Is it that they are not plainly expressed in the New Testament? Quite otherwise. They are things so far from being drawn from doubtful interpretations of obscure passages, that they lie full in sight before us, upon looking into the gospel. Surely there should be more care used, that while we are *burning up the tares*, we *destroy not with them the wheat also*.

Unjustifiable as this is, it is to be suspected, that some good minds have been drawn into it, from a generous and worthy, but ill-conducted design, of rendering the Christian scheme more palatable to the taste of unbelievers. But will it render it more credible? One would think not. One would rather imagine, that when the professed friends of revelation give up many of its distinguishing doctrines, as indefensible, this would be so far from recommending the rest as true, that it would rather furnish them with a good argument for rejecting the whole (considered under the notion of a revelation from God) as false. And does such a conduct tend to promote the purposes of the gospel in the world,

world, or to give it greater power to improve the minds, or reform the lives of men? It cannot with any reason be presumed. The doctrines referred to, have an immediate and direct influence upon practice; they are distinguishing parts of the gospel method of restoring men to God, and intended to strengthen all the obligations to obedience. They represent our relation to God as more near and engaging; our dependence upon him as more constant and beneficial; and our access to him as more encouraging; and consequently they are all directly suited to establish a most delightful intercourse between him and our minds. And what is this, but the most powerful spring of those affections to our God and Redeemer, which must keep alive the piety, and establish the virtue of Christians? And can the disparagement of such truths conduce to the general advancement of religion? The contrary may be justly expected from it. To exclude them, is to take away some of the most affecting engagements to the love and obedience of God; and they, who do and teach men so, it is to be feared, enfeeble the best hold upon their virtue, and of consequence, though unwarily, become partakers of their sins.

A liberty of enquiry and of private judgment is the natural right of every man; and Christianity is so far from abridging it, that it recommends and applauds the free use of it. But a liberty of modelling a divine revelation according to pleasure, is what no reasonable man would wish to lay claim to, nor can he justify himself
to

to God or the world for assuming it. Let no Christian fear for the gospel, or any of its doctrines, so far as to be tempted to this conduct with a view either to justify or recommend it. It needs not any such concessions; nor will it ever gain any advantage by them. Its evidence, after having been tried *as by fire*, has come forth like gold, still *brighter and more weighty*; and its doctrines have appeared more *worthy of all acceptance*, as they have been more closely examined; every way agreeable to the nature and perfections of God, and suited to the state and necessities of men; so that they need nothing more to recommend them to any good mind, than to be considered. And even those which have been thought most exceptionable, (like some parts of the natural world, which at first sight have appeared less harmonious or useful) upon farther search, have been discovered to be its greatest excellences, and to contain most admirable exertions of divine wisdom and goodness.——A modest caution in all cases, becomes wise and good men; but in none more than in the judgment they form, and the assertions they lay down concerning the divine proceedings; least *haply*, by taking an undue free with them, *they be found even to fight against God*. And they should consider too the advantage which persons of bad dispositions will probably take from their method of treating revelation, to encourage themselves in the neglect of its most important rules of life. If this liberty be allowable in judging of the truth of its doctrines, why not, of the goodness of its morals? If the former are
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to be brought to the test of human apprehensions concerning the fitness of things, and to be rejected if they agree not with them, why (will they say) may not the latter be tried by the rule of natural appetite, of present interest and convenience, and be rejected in those instances wherein they thwart or oppose it? Why may not we choose for ourselves what we will obey, as well as others what they will believe? It is well, if this inference has not been sometimes made.——And what effect it must have upon the purity of mens morals, may be easily imagined.——This dangerous affectation of an over-refinement of the gospel has contributed (it is to be feared) not a little to another evil of great prejudice to the general power of religion amongst us, and that is,

2. A visible decay in spirituality. By spirituality I do not mean an useless, unimproving enthusiasm, which helps neither to better the heart, nor to mend the life; but such a deep and serious impression of spiritual and eternal objects, as is wrought into the heart by an habitual persuasion of the reality and importance of them, and which has a direct and immediate tendency to purify and adorn the Christian character. The religion of Jesus is suited to form the minds of men to this disposition, its discoveries, its promises, its prospects and hopes all lead to it; and it is what he, our great Master, repeatedly inculcates upon his followers, as most essential to a right and useful conduct in the world. And whoever considers its extensive influence, must

must acknowledge the great importance of it in the character of such, both towards supporting their own virtue, and promoting religion in others. For it is by a lively, abiding apprehension of things spiritual and future, that a Christian acquires such a rational firmness of spirit amidst all worldly concerns, as prevents his being enslaved to any mean and unworthy passion. And that which makes him good in himself, makes him good and useful in the world; his life more exemplary, and his whole conversation more edifying, and such as shall convey a favour of religion amongst all around him. On the contrary, a declension herein must be proportionably injurious to the cause of piety; and the indications of such a declension are surely but too visible amongst us.

And may we not too justly ascribe it to this cause, that so many Christians have been tempted to reduce the whole of religion to what may properly enough be stiled mere morality, and to encourage in themselves and others a delusive attempt of reconciling a life of pleasure and vanity with the purity of the gospel profession? The consequence of which has been, that the power of religion in general has declined both in their own hearts, and in the regards of those that were influenced by their examples. For, whatever respect men may pretend to pay to the social virtues, as if all goodness was contained in them only, and as if a natural probity of mind and sense of honour were sufficient to secure the practice of them, it is certain, that when once the foundation of piety is destroyed,
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every thing else that is good, is in imminent danger of sinking soon into the ruins of it. Experience fully shews the feebleness of all other supports, when this is gone, and with what uncertainty other considerations operate without its assistance.

And how much has this unhappy decay of spirituality in good men, contributed to promote that high taste for pleasure and amusement, which now so generally prevails, and which has had such a fatal influence upon the corruption of our manners! Where this increases, religion and sobriety must decline, and indeed usually sink into contempt. And how can it be more effectually kept in countenance, than by the examples of those who should restrain it? If persons of general esteem for goodness grow vain and trifling, others will soon grow licentious; if they appear, notwithstanding their profession, to be really *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*, no wonder that others, who will be glad at their follies, to countenance their own, grow *abominable and disobedient, to every good work reprobate*. That which naturally follows upon a decay in piety is,

3. A low opinion of religious institutions. An evil but too common, and which has spread itself more generally amongst us from the countenance it has received by the example of many, whose characters in other respects have been unexceptionable. The pernicious effects of it, and its bad influence upon the morals of society, may be easily discerned from what I just now suggested, which was, the near connection there

is between a sense of piety and the practice of virtue. If the latter be ever well supported, it must be by the aids it receives from the former. Unless virtue be found in conjunction with piety, it rests upon too weak a foundation to withstand the assaults of interest, pleasure, or passion. To weaken this hold upon the minds of men, is to weaken the most powerful ties and obligations to virtue, and secretly to enfeeble the surest restraints of licentiousness.

Now if a sense of piety be kept up amongst men, it must be by a proper regard to, and attendance on the institutions of religion; such as the public worship of God, public instruction, and other employments of the sanctuary; for these are the means, which the wisdom of God has appointed, and which his providence leads to, in order to that end. But if men are taught to think lightly of them, how can it be imagined, but that their benefit and good purpose will be obstructed? They will be either not attended, or if they are, will be but little regarded; the effect of which, as observation shews us, must be an unrestrained dissoluteness and irreligion.

And will not men be naturally led into this profane negligence, if they observe, that persons, otherwise of understanding and of professed sobriety, decline in their regards to these solemnities? If they hear them speak of them with a visible slight, perhaps sometimes with a secret sneer, they will be ready enough to conclude at once, that they are little better than useless insignificant things. If they observe, that

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such persons grow remiss in their attendance upon them, and exercise no care, that either themselves or others may improve by them, it will be natural for them, without scruple, to run unto the common neglect of the sabbath, and by degrees to despise every thing sacred. These effects will but too naturally follow from such a conduct in persons of character and discernment, whose opinion the unexperienced and careless are willing enough to build upon, when it favours any irreligious propensities in themselves. One would not charge the growing neglect of public worship, which of late has been so visible amongst us, wholly to this cause; but in many instances it hath undoubtedly contributed to it. And surely when it is considered how great an inlet to all vice and corruption the profanation of the sabbath is, one would willingly hope that good men would not wish to be in the least accessory to a thing so pernicious. And it is certainly worthy of their reflection, that as their own worth or piety is not likely to gain any advantage from so indiscreet a behaviour, so the worth and piety of many, who are likely to be influenced by them, are in danger of being totally ruined, or at least, of being much obstructed by means of it. This unbecoming conduct is often attended by another thing of no small disservice to national piety, and that is falling in with,

4. A fashionable contempt of the ministers of religion. Generally speaking, it is true, personal respect will follow personal merit, and rise or fall in proportion to it. And where this is wanting,

wanting, no outward character whatever can give a right or claim to it. Nay, the more eminent and respectable the profession is, by which a man is distinguished, the greater contempt will he fall under, if his abilities for it, or behaviour in it, fall short of what might be expected. And for this reason no character is more despicable and mean than that of an ignorant or vicious preacher of the gospel. No man must expect to derive dignity from his office who does not bring dignity to it.

And in this case he must not think it hard, if the world denies him that respect which his rank in life may seem to entitle him to.

But I am not speaking of personal respect, which they who are most anxious about, are usually the least deserving of, but of that which for the good of religion ought to be shewn towards those, whose office it is to promote and advance it in the world. And certainly, tho' it be true, that a bad man can derive no honour from it, it is no just inference from thence, that therefore a good man should be despised upon the account of it. And yet one would think this was sometimes thought reasonable; and that a person forfeits all right to the ordinary regards due to men of equal worth, merely because he belongs to it.

That this should be expressed by the enemies of religion is not strange, and that they should be glad to take occasion from the unworthiness of a few, to disparage a cause, which must ever be a reproach to themselves. The duties of the ministry, when rightly performed, throw too

strong a light upon them and their actions to be pleasing; and as this is painful and insupportable to them, it is no mean policy to endeavour to turn off the attention of the world from thence, by setting up those as the objects of contempt and ridicule who create them so much inward uneasiness. But one would not expect any thing of this kind from the friends of religion. For, though it be a thing fashionable, and sometimes considered as an argument of superior wit and understanding, yet, did they but consider its evil effects, and how much the cause of religion will probably suffer by it, especially when it comes from them, one would hope, they should rather choose to be content with the plainer character of solid goodness and wisdom, than to aspire to any other by such unworthy means. It should be considered as one reason against it, that hereby an order of men, many of whom, at least, must be allowed to be not the most inconsiderable friends and ornaments to society, are injured in their deserved esteem; but there is another of still greater weight, which is, that the valuable and most important designs of their office, no less than the reformation and improvement, and best happiness of mankind, and without which, all sense of religion must be soon worn out of the world, must be greatly obstructed thereby. From the multitude, who are chiefly influenced by the sentiments of their superiors, no other can be expected; for there is no great probability, that men will hear with much respect, or receive any great advantage from persons, whom

they

they have been taught before-hand to despise. And is not this to be *partakers of other mens sins*? Perhaps a still more prevailing instance of this kind is,

5. The want of religious order and wise government in families. A thing but too common even amongst many persons otherwise of worthy and good characters. It is from these private societies that the public interest looks for its support. And as the spirit and manners of those, who are the heads of them, in a great measure, govern the taste and form the character of the rising age, hence appears the importance of discreet management and good order there. For most persons receive in that situation those impressions, sentiments and habits whereby they are usually influenced in the future scenes of life. So that the dispositions and practices they carry with them from thence, whether good or bad, religious or profane, are such as must gradually diffuse themselves in the world at large, either to the advantage or to the mischief of religion in society. The well-ordered families of good men are nurseries of virtue. But is a proper care generally taken to render them so? Does that good order and wise regulation prevail in many, which tends to it? Let every one look at home,

Doubtless, an exemplary conduct, a restraint upon licentiousness and disorders amongst inferiors, an absolute discountenance of all profaneness, having children and servants in all sobriety, the regular worship and acknowledgment of God, prudent hints and intimations, as oc-

caution offers, recommended with compassion and kindness, are things that may be expected in the houses of Christians; and their good tendency cannot be questioned. Were they but generally practised, they could not but have a considerable influence towards the reformation of the world. And must not the neglect of such pious and wise order be equally prejudicial? If these things are hardly ever known or heard of, where it might be expected they should be constantly visible, there is not only a most valuable opportunity of promoting religion lost, but many must be sent out into the world under the worst prejudice against it, viz. that it is itself nothing more than mere empty shew and pretence; because they observe that they, who are called religious, whatever appearance of it they make in public, are in private life as easy about it as other men. — And this naturally leads me to take notice of another, but too fruitful source of irreligion from the same quarter, and that is,

6. A neglect of proper and pious care in education. Indiscretions in this particular, it is true, are usually numerous enough, and they are more easily reckoned up than rectified. All that I have any concern to speak of, are such as have a visible effect upon the Christian character, and they are briefly these two. The one is, an immoderate concern about external accomplishments, to the neglect of those that are more valuable. And the other is, an unconstrained indulgence of passion and inclination; both which naturally lead either to mere vanity
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and indolence, or, which is worse, to irreligion and wickedness in after-life. By the one, young persons are insensibly inured to look upon an advantageous appearance in the gayer scenes of the world, (into which they are usually but too early introduced) as the most important of all attainments; and this, together with that superficial knowledge, which may be collected from ordinary conversation, they are accordingly ready to satisfy themselves with, as a very sufficient furniture both for mind and body. Hereby an high taste for pleasure, that most destructive passion, is early imbibed, and takes up the whole heart; and all just sentiments, solid acquirements, worthy views in life, are considered as heavy, unpleasing things, and the thoughts of them discarded with disgust. By this unhappy mistake we see many, whose natural abilities, under proper culture and direction, would have rendered them useful members of society, and a support and honour to religion and their country, so trained up as to be really useless to either; perhaps worse than useless, the prey of every vain passion, and a burden and disgrace to the world. The structure is indeed outwardly beautiful, ornamented and showy, but inwardly destitute of furniture and use, the habitation of airy imaginations, and fantastic follies; it may be, *the cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*

The other, namely, the unrestrained indulgence of passion and inclination, is perhaps still more fatal. For what can be expected from any one, whose spirit has always been unac-

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customed to restraint or self-denial? But an utter impatience of both, a confident insolence of mind, a notion of self-sufficiency, ungoverned passions, and a contempt of reason and of all authority. The first effect of this error is usually, that such despise their parents; and when they have lost a proper respect for them, it is not likely they will long regard any body else, who would direct them for their good. And can this be thought a proper foundation, for that submission of the will to reason, that profound obedience of heart to the laws of God, which is the ground and essence of virtue and religion? And what appearance are they, who come out into the world from under such tuition, likely to make, either as encouragers of piety and good morals, or as friends to their country? Through high-swelling words of vanity they may indeed for a while deceive others, but where there is nothing solidly good in a man's own mind, generally speaking, society has but little good to expect from him. He may affect to appear a patron of liberty, and promise it to others, but nothing uniformly valuable can result from thence, *seeing he himself is the servant of corruption.*

The effects of this culpable neglect are never seen in so full and just a light, as when compared with the happy fruits of a wiser and more attentive conduct amongst Christians of greater prudence and piety. We behold their families with delight, as no other than seminaries of good sense and of wisdom, and where those seeds of piety and goodness are sown, which the

the world afterwards largely reaps the advantageous fruits of; where tender minds are in every engaging method formed to truth, self-government and religion; and from whence those are sent out into society, who prove the best ornaments and blessings of it. The world is not a little indebted to the discretion and timely prudence of such Christians. They are justly esteemed the most valuable friends of religion and of their country, and worthy of distinguished honour. I must mention one thing more, which, in some persons of character, has considerably tended to weaken the restraints upon national irreligion, and that is, *to 7.* A false modesty. By this I mean a want of courage to appear upon proper occasions in the cause of virtue and piety; and a seeming compliance with the vain and corrupt taste of others. This error has not always been the prevailing fault of good men. There was a time when religion was made to appear almost in every thing. To avoid this extreme, which brought on, in some cases, but too justly, the imputation of hypocrisy, many have been carried into another, of affecting a secret flight of it, and of carefully avoiding the least appearance of regard to it, even where the occasion naturally calls upon them to appear in its defence. So that they have fallen into a different species of hypocrisy, not of seeming more pious, but far less so than they really are. By this means the reputation and esteem of religion is, at times, greatly injured. For from hence the cause of vice and profane folly has often triumphed,

triumphed, where it might have received a just rebuke; religion has been regarded as a matter, which had no solid ground for its support; and many have been tempted to look upon it as a mean unmanly thing which persons of sense and taste were really ashamed of. Though an indiscreet and untimely shew of piety be indeed no way commendable, but is rather an argument of weakness, or ostentation, or design, yet certainly there are seasons and occasions, when it is so far from being imprudent or unbecoming, that it is the duty of a Christian to appear in honour of it; and when his resolution should discover itself, either in giving a proper check to profane folly, or in vindicating the cause of injured religion. — A cause which will bear the best vindication, and which no man has any reason to be ashamed of, but he who is conscious of being a shame to it. Others may have been inflexible in trifles; but the fear of this will never justify us in an error more dangerous, namely, being indifferent and yielding in matters of solid importance. By such mean compliances religion itself must suffer, and the esteem and power of it be proportionably endangered in the world.

The things I have now laid before you contain some of the chief instances of blameable indiscretion, mistake, or neglect, whereby we have reason to fear many good men amongst us have become *partakers of other mens sins*; whereby they have either unhappily contributed to the national irreligion, or lessened their influence towards the reformation of it. Who-

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ever attends to them with seriousness, or pursues them into their natural consequences, must discern their evil effects in both these particulars; and, of course, how much the amendment of them must help towards our recovery. Every good man must be grieved to see that the corruption and irreligion of the nation, should have acquired so great an accession out of that quarter, from whence should have come its greatest restraint and discouragement. But if it be so, it was high time we discerned it, and lamented it, and betook ourselves to a more religious Caution and wisdom.

The wickedness of the world is not to be removed by mere declamation, nor by lively descriptions of its enormity and danger, nor by applying only to its more flagrant discoveries and symptoms. If we would root out or suppress the disease, we must trace it up to its original, and strike at its first seeds and principles; and if they can be destroyed, the other, though painful and threatening for a while, will in time abate and die away of themselves. Till this be done, it is not to be expected, that the constitution should acquire any lasting strength and firmness.

In enquiring into, and laying open the malady, we are now considering, it is a great advantage, that we are speaking to those, who have it both in their power and inclination to remedy it. The grossly depraved are usually too much hardened to be impressed; and the obstinate and prejudiced often will cherish their disease, when we would use our best pains to assist

assist them in the cure of it. It is our duty to apply to such, *if peradventure God will give them repentance unto salvation*, though success is all the while but unpromising. But when we apply to persons of thought and understanding, of ingenuity and worth, the prospect becomes far more encouraging: they will need no apology for the honest freedom which those, who are friends to religion together with themselves, use upon so important a subject. And though it should give some uneasy reflections for the present, yet even those reflections themselves will operate kindly with other considerations, to quicken their zeal and care in curing the evil complained of. If any persons engage with a due concern and seriousness in such solemnities as this, it may be presumed good men do; and certainly we cannot answer the ends of them in a manner more acceptable to God, or more beneficial to our country, than by entering faithfully on the most effectual means of suppressing the power of vice and irreligion amongst us. I will exercise your patience no longer, than while I briefly remind you,

III. Of the many and weighty considerations, which should engage us to the more faithful observance of this important rule of conduct. As

1. The glory of God. A motive and principle of action the most noble and excellent that can awaken the human soul, and which every generous and well formed mind must readily feel the impressions of. The glory of God is the advancement of his kingdom of righteousness, virtue and purity, in the world;

the suitable acknowledgement of his perfections and government, of his authority and grace amongst mankind. And how truly great and worthy a part do they bear in the creation, who exert themselves in promoting such a design; who have a zeal that the great Father and Lord of the universe, who continually showers down good amongst his creatures, may be suitably honoured by them; and who improve their respective influence in encouraging obedience to those laws, which he has given for the improvement and perfection of rational creatures, and to establish order and happiness through his works?

To advance this glorious design he sent his own Son into this world. And from whom may a proper concern to promote and carry it on, be expected, if not from the servants of God, and the professed disciples of his Son? If his glory be supported in the societies of men, it must be by their means. These were the instruments which in every age God made use of, to sustain his cause, and to prevent the world from running into a total corruption of manners. And surely one would think that a low degree of zeal for God, was sufficient to guard such persons against those instances of conduct which tend to dishonour him. It might be presumed indeed, that hardly any good man would be content to express merely this negative kind of piety towards him. The more eminent degrees of this sacred passion, it is our duty as Christians to cultivate; and these doubtless will put us upon active endeavours that

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that all around us *may glorify our Father who is in heaven.*

2. The present welfare and future happiness of mankind. This lies in close connection with the glory of God; but may be considered as a distinct and most engaging argument with every good man to study the advancement of religion. He can be no friend to human kind who wishes not to see them wise and virtuous; for by no other means can they be truly happy. And how can we be said to wish that, which we are careless whether we obstruct or no; which we will not exercise a little attention, or self-denial, or resolution to promote? It was to redeem men from their sins, that Christ died. So great was his charity to them! So wisely was it pointed! And shall they who profess to be his members, be so wholly void of the like generous affection, as to destroy, by their neglect, any for whom Christ died? To do this by design would be the highest impiety and cruelty; so to do it through the omission of an easy, natural, proper care, is at least an argument of great defect in goodness and charity.

And methinks I might recommend this matter to you with peculiar advantage from this topic of charity, in an age so remarkably distinguished by the exercise of that generous virtue. Never did a noble tenderness to the distresses of others appear more visible, or abound more in its proper fruits, perhaps in any nation or time, than our own. So that one would hope we might be the more easily prevailed upon to follow it in its further and still more valuable discoveries.

coveries. For can we pretend to have compassion for the bodies of men, and none for their souls? Shall we bestir ourselves to relieve their present distresses, and do nothing to deliver them from their vices, or to prevent their falling under the dreadful consequences of them? Are we ready to contribute to their temporal good, and shall we have no regard to their happiness for ever? nor concern ourselves whether we advance or hinder it, by the necessary influence which our conduct, one way or other, must have upon it? Surely consistent charity; charity founded in nature indeed, but conducted by reason, principle, and conscience, should not fail to discover itself in these more important purposes of good to our fellow-creatures. Then are we their true patrons and friends, when our charity to them takes in the whole compass of their happiness within its reach.

3. The welfare of posterity and of our country. Besides those around us, whom we cannot look upon and consider without the tenderest emotions of nature, and whose well doing must therefore lie near our hearts, we are led, by a natural affection to our kind, to wish the whole rising generation the enjoyments of future peace and safety in society; that they all may possess the blessings of free Britons, and be a support to religion, after our own intercourse with the world shall be broken off for ever. And can we possibly contribute better to this desirable purpose, than by our faithful endeavours to leave them under the impressions of rational piety, and formed to the love and habits of virtue?

tue? Certainly we cannot leave a better legacy to the community, we once belonged to, than such persons who, by diffusing a sense of religion amongst others, in their day, shall lay and perpetuate the most solid ground-work of its happiness.

And in every time of public difficulty and danger (such as this is) what method can we take so effectually to secure the favourable aspects of providence, as resolving each of us in our several stations, to enter without delay upon this pious work? Our country now calls for every thing we can do for it. And if we can obtain an interest in God, we lay the best foundation of its security; for *happy is that people whose God is the Lord*. For this purpose we now humble ourselves in his presence, acknowledge our former sins and omissions, and implore, with united supplications, his forgiveness and blessing. *But hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams*. The most solemn and pompous services, without obedience or reformation, are no better than profane mockery in his sight. It is true, past omissions cannot be recalled; but perhaps their effects may yet in some measure be remedied. We may be more zealous, more faithful, more watchful to improve occasions, and to employ our influence in advancing the honour of God, and the power of religion. And if we have any meaning in this solemnity, it is, that we engage ourselves so to be and to do, And how
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can we enter into such an engagement, without resolving to pursue it in those ways, which providence and our respective circumstances in life point out to us? By a sincere active diligence herein we shall discover a true love to our country, and shall most successfully baffle the power and artifice of our enemies. For that God, whom we thus honour, will not fail to distinguish us by the tokens of his presence, and with the favourable displays of his power. He will ever befriend our interests, and enable us *to tread down under our feet, those that rise up against us.*

The effects of such a worthy, religious industry amongst good men in their several stations, shall open to our prospect a scene most desirable and joyous. A scene, wherein peace and liberty, virtue and good order shall reign with uncontrouled sway, and shed abroad their gracious light and influences through this happy isle. A scene, unclouded by threatenings from abroad, and undisturbed by intestine commotions; and from whence, destructive war, with all it's hideous train of mischiefs, shall be banished for ever; or, in the beautiful expression of the Psalmist, wherein *mercy and truth shall meet together, righteousness and peace shall kiss each other; truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good.*

To conclude—Let all of us bring this matter home seriously to our own hearts, by attending to the future consequences of observing or neglecting this important admonition in regard to

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ourselves. There is a season coming on, when each of us shall more narrowly survey the minuter parts of our conduct than we do now, and when our reflections thereupon will be more serious.—And amongst others, no doubt, those which related to our influence in the world, whereby we have either promoted the virtue and happiness of it, or increased its corruption and misery, will be reviewed. In that hour it must be a great addition to our comfort, to think we had any ways advanced the honour of God and the interest of mankind, or had endeavoured to do it. But if we have the hearts of Christians then left us, it must give us unspeakable trouble to reflect, that religion and the souls of others had suffered by our means, though it were through neglect or indiscretion only. Nay, though we should then have good hope, through grace, of the pardon of our own sins, the remembrance of their sins, of which we had been partakers, must considerably lessen the comfort of that pardon, and wound us with distress and shame. We must then consider the evil we have done in this respect, as a mischief we can never remedy, which we can never atone for, and which others may probably suffer eternally the sad effects of. A thought most affecting and grievous to any serious spirit! And at such a season every one will be serious. And as in this world such guilty negligence shall be a great diminution of our comfort, so in the other of our reward. For if the recompence of those, *who turn many to righteousness*, shall be more illustrious than that of other good men; theirs,

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theirs, without question, must be proportionably lessened, who, on the contrary, (though through mere imprudence) were necessary to the sins of many. To attend duly to these consequences (which perhaps may not be very distant from some of us) should methinks awaken us to that active care and fidelity in this matter, which will bear a calm and peaceful review at last. May we and all the servants of God acquit ourselves herein, as becomes those who have a true zeal for his honour, and a consistent love to mankind and their country. Amen.

S E R M O N VIII.

The Nature and Excellence of
Charity.

By the Rev. Mr. HOLLAND.

1 COR. xiii. 1.

*Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of
angels, and have not Charity, I am become as
sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

IN this chapter the apostle has drawn a most
admirable picture of Charity : all the parts
of which I propose to consider distinctly in
the ensuing discourse. God grant, that while
we meditate upon this greatest of all virtues,
and view it, as here described, in its nature,
properties, and high importance, we may be
excited to cherish it in our own tempers.

But, first, it may be proper to observe, in
what manner this encomium upon Charity is
introduced, and how it stands connected with
the foregoing chapter. The apostle, we find,
is there discoursing of the abilities, and mira-
culous powers conferred by the Spirit upon
those, who embraced the faith of Christ ; such

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as preaching, prophesying, working miracles, healing the sick, speaking with tongues, and interpreting the Scriptures. He shews, that these several gifts had each their excellence, and conspired in promoting the benefit and edification of the church: nevertheless, some of them being useful in a greater, some in a less degree, he exhorts the Corinthians, without despising those that were least useful, earnestly to aspire after such gifts as were the best and most excellent. But, says he, though these talents, and miraculous powers are wonderful in themselves, and being applied as they ought, may enable you to be serviceable to your fellow-Christians; yet, behold I shew you something, which is far more excellent than them, unattended with which they all become contemptible and mean. For, *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing.* In these verses the apostle asserts, that spiritual gifts, however extraordinary and wonderful, if they are not accompanied with Charity, as they have nothing in them truly excellent, nor are likely to render men serviceable to others; so neither will they be of any advantage to such as possess them. And though the supernatural powers to which Charity is here expressly preferred, have long since ceased; yet I apprehend the

sense of the apostle may justly be so applied, as to be of use to Christians in all ages. For if to speak all languages by divine inspiration; if to know and foretell what is in futurity; if to be instructed from heaven in those things which are concealed from the rest of mortals; if to have a faith that is attended with a command over nature, and a power even to remove mountains; if all these extraordinary abilities are unprofitable and vain without Charity; much more must that learning, and knowledge, and faith be so, which any Christian in these latter days can possibly attain.

In imitation, therefore, of the apostle, every man living may thus say to himself, *Tho' I could speak all the polite languages with the greatest ease and fluency; though I could express myself in the best manner, and with the most moving eloquence, so that all who hear me should look upon me with astonishment, as something more than mortal, and admire me as an angel come down from heaven: yet, if I am not influenced by Charity in the exercise of these talents, they will answer no valuable end, either to myself, or others. As to myself, I shall not be a whit the more valuable in the sight of God upon account of them: and while I use them only to procure the applause of men, and not to do them service, there is but little probability, that I should obtain an end, which I never proposed. My eloquence and wit may render me, as it were, an instrument of sound, that tinkles*

tinkles in the ear, but leaves no good impressions on the heart.

And though I had such a thorough knowledge of men and things, as would enable me to judge probably of future events; though I had travelled through all the regions of science, and dived into the mysteries of every art; though I understood whatever is most obscure and difficult in nature and religion; though I could dispute with ever so much learning and ability, and decide right in every controversy; though my head abounded with the justest notions, and my faith was sound and orthodox in every point: even all this knowledge and faith would avail me nothing, if in the mean time I wanted the gift of Charity.

The apostle proceeds in the third verse, assuring us, that the most striking appearances of liberality and fortitude are worthless and vain, when not attended with Charity, and animated by it: *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.* From which words it is evident, that though there may be the greatest profusion of worldly substance, and the highest degree of voluntary suffering, where there is no real Charity; yet such bounty, and such sufferings, have nothing in them laudable and excellent, or that will turn to account with regard to our acceptance with God. We commonly term the bare act of giving to the poor, Charity; we may call it martyrdom, to suffer in the cause of religion, upon any prin-

ciple; but he alone is the truly charitable-man, whose hand is opened by the benevolence of his heart: he only is the true martyr, who dies in supporting a religion, out of regard to the welfare of society, and the happiness of mankind which depend upon it.

We may therefore enlarge in the following manner upon the sentiments of the apostle; If I contribute of my worldly substance to the wants of my fellow-creatures, either to gain a recompence from them, or to feast my vanity upon their applause, or to excite in spectators a good opinion of my generosity; if I relieve the indigent with my whole fortune, upon these principles, and not out of real humanity; I have done nothing, which God, who knows my heart, will approve. Again, should I express an earnest concern for the spreading of religion, and take ever so much pains to win men over to my own persuasion, not for their sake, but merely to acquire a name for piety and devotion; in the judgment of God, all my labour would be vain, and my zeal fruitless: nay, should I give my body to the flames to manifest my zeal, if this has not Charity for its foundation, but ariseth from a spirit of obstinacy, or a desire of being celebrated as a martyr, I shall neither deserve nor receive any reward for my sufferings.

The sacred author having thus observed, that no gifts and abilities, nor the most heroic actions are of any value without Charity, proceeds to describe the happy influence of

of this divine principle on the temper of him, who is inspired by it: and the first amiable property he mentions, is *patience in bearing injuries*. *Charity suffereth long, and is not easily provoked*. It looks upon itself as nearly allied to all men; and esteems no injuries they may offer to it, sufficient to justify an alienation of mind from them; its anger is kept down by its love for those who insult and wrong it. Whatever injuries it receives, though it could avenge itself with ease, yet in no case will it pursue an offender, till it finds it necessary for the good of society, or its own preservation: and while it meditates punishment, it acts not from passion, or a thirst after revenge; but even from the same calm goodness, which it breathes toward those that never offended it.

Charity is kind. To do good to men, to spread love and peace, joy and happiness among them, as far as its influence can extend, is equally its business and delight. It considers every opportunity it meets with of obliging another, as a blessing to itself. Nor content with performing only those good offices that fall in its way, it casts about and contrives how by its counsel, fortune, or personal service it may be most useful to mankind around it: it attends to their circumstances, and suits itself to the state of their affairs; advising the perplexed, instructing the ignorant, comforting the afflicted, relieving the indigent, and assisting its friends according to its ability. Nor does it confine its kindness to those who are connected with it by the ties of interest or blood,—

blood.—That you are a man,—that you are in want,—that it is able to serve you without omitting any duty of greater moment, are sufficient pleas to engage in your behalf its generous aid. In short, the only reason why it does not make every human creature happy, is because it cannot.

Charity envieth not: it is proof against that ill-natured pain which little minds feel, when they see others outstripping them in any accomplishment. If such as were behind overtake it, equal, or get before it in the race of life, it can pray sincerely, that God would speed them: when its neighbour exceeds it in ability or fortune, it becomes at least his equal in excellence, by rejoicing in all his advantages. Though it could with its own defects and calamities removed, yet to see its superiors brought down to a level with it, would be far from affording it any satisfaction. It observes their miscarriages with a generous concern, and is relieved, under its own disappointments, by the pleasure it takes in beholding their success. Thus envy and Charity are directly opposite in their nature and properties; for envy delights in the evil, and grieves at the good of its neighbour; Charity, on the other hand, is pleased with his happiness, and grieved when evil befalls him.

Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. It neither entertains itself, nor endeavours to create in others extravagant ideas of its own dignity. Observing the weakness of mankind to be such, that most men are dissatisfied when

when they see themselves out-done in advantages of mind, body, or fortune; it is not forward to display, or magnify its superiority over them in any respect: it rather seems to shrink down, as it were, to a level with its inferiors, and hide from them those advantages, the sight of which could answer no other end, but to put them out of conceit with themselves, and their own condition. Hence it supplies the poor, hardly appearing to take notice of their poverty; and instructs the ignorant without upbraiding them with their defects, or setting off its own superior wisdom. It esteems no mortal below its regard, because heaven has placed him far below it in rank and fortune: on the contrary, it makes every man, whom vice and guilt has not debased, its brother and its equal, as far as is consistent with the necessary distinctions of human society. It is of too high a spirit to look upon any office, as dishonourable to it, by which it can be of real service to the meanest of those, who are the sons of God, and the brethren of Christ.

And being thus free from pride, it is, upon that account, the less liable to behave itself unseemly: for, moderately speaking, one half of the indecencies men are guilty of in their conversation and commerce with each other, are owing to arrogance, vanity, and conceit; from all which, Charity is secured by that modesty and humility which always attends it. And though a benevolent man may not be so perfect in those outward forms of good breeding, which having no foundation

tion in nature, but depending wholly on fancy and custom, are infinitely various in different times and places; yet his unaffected good nature, and the uprightness of his heart, make ample amends for these trifling failures.

Charity seeketh not her own, but the advantage of others. Some, when they are doing good, are all the while looking at themselves, and consulting only their own reputation or worldly interest: they put on the appearance, that they may gain the fame of virtue; and that, by means of the esteem it procures them, they may advance themselves in the world with the greater ease and security: but Charity is an entire stranger to this kind of policy; it is too honest to deceive, too wise to be crafty and cunning; it does good to men, purely because it loves them, and would be satisfied with the generous act, though no recompence were to follow it, besides the consciousness of its own virtue. If the fruit it bears is useful and good to others, its end is answered, its whole design compleatly finished. Like the sun, it warms and blesses the world with its influence, equally keeping its course, and shining on, whether mankind praise or revile it.

The next property the apostle ascribes to Charity, viz. that it *is not easily provoked*, I have considered already; and proceed with him to observe, that it *thinketh no evil*. Love fills its breast, and leaves no room there for treachery, fraud, and malicious intentions. It never attempts to deceive its neighbour to his prejudice, and will not take the advantage of his

his ignorance to enrich itself at his cost. You may securely entrust your affairs in its hands; for it will no more wrong you, if it has opportunity of doing it in thick darkness and the deepest secrecy, than when it acts in the sight of a crowd. It never deliberates about a mean action, and is so far from committing injustice, that it would no sooner think of doing it, than of attempting the most impossible thing in nature.

Again, *Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.* It takes no satisfaction in observing the faults and miscarriages of others; but is glad when it sees them excel in wisdom and virtue. Their laudable conduct affords greater delight than malice conceives at the slips of her enemies: nor is malice more sincerely grieved at the excellencies of those, against whom it is directed, than Charity is at the failings of them it loves: it frankly gives to all men the praise that is due to their merit, and is not forward to publish the faults of any.

This leads me to the next words, which are in our translation, *beareth all things*; but ought to have been rendered, *covereth all things*: the same word in the original being used here, and doubtless with the same intention as in 1 Pet. iv. 8. *Charity will cover a multitude of sins.* Unless when it would answer some good end, it will not reveal the imperfections of its neighbour: in all other cases it will industriously hide them, and be as cautious of exposing his character, as of lessening its own. As
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it does not indulge itself, so neither will it encourage others, in venting slander and detraction, by listening to their censures with greediness and pleasure. On the contrary, it will endeavour to silence them by a cold reception, or by openly expressing a dislike to such insinuations. When malice attacks a man's fame in his absence, either with falsehood or truth, it generally appears in his defence; and either vindicates him from false aspersions, or in the best manner it can, excuses and palliates what cannot be denied.

Charity believeth all things, hopeth all things. Persons of dark and malicious natures, are forward to entertain mean sentiments of all around them: they measure others by themselves; and being sensible of little or no excellence in their own tempers, they can scarce believe there is any virtue in the world. Hence they abound with groundless distrust and jealousy, put the worst construction it will bear on the behaviour of others, and are ready to condemn all men as knaves and hypocrites. On the other hand, a generous, honest mind is apt to believe and hope the best of all men, and counts upon finding that goodness abroad, which it feels at home. Conscious of sincerity in its own behaviour, it wonders if the world can be so bad as it is often represented, and frankly ascribes to worthy principles every practice that bears a promising appearance. It esteems it more eligible to err on the favourable, than on the severe side; and would chuse to think better than they deserve of many different persons,
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rather than to injure one good man in its judgment concerning him.

Lastly, *Charity endureth all things.*

Fervent love to mankind inspires the noblest and most resolute courage. It enables a man cheerfully to spend and be spent; to undergo pain, hardship, disgrace, and death itself in serving his generation. Such was its influence upon this glorious apostle, who seems to have distinguished himself above the rest of heavenly spirits, by receiving into his soul an overflowing portion of benevolence. When he saw bonds and afflictions waiting for him in every place, yet none of these things moved him; neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might promote the spread of the gospel, and thereby the happiness of mankind. Thus does Charity form the hero, and the martyr; and every other human character that is truly great and illustrious.

The apostle having thus enumerated the lovely properties and blessed effects of Charity; to crown all, he adds, *that it never faileth.* After it has adorned the life of a good man here, it shall not drop him at death; but shall enter into heaven with him, and be a principal ingredient in his happiness and perfection to all eternity. Upon this account, it infinitely excels all other gifts and abilities. As to prophecy, it will perish as fast as events come forward; the use of languages will be at an end, when our new being commences; and the search, which we here call, knowledge, will be determined in what will be really such.

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176 *The Nature and Excellence of Charity.*

All these Excellencies, which do but lead to the arrival of what is more perfect, will necessarily have an end, when we shall come to that perfection.

As the understanding of a child is improved by receiving notices of things which contribute to his good conduct when a man; but, though then necessary, are thrown aside when he is arrived at manhood: so do all the good arts of this life contribute towards our obtaining perfection in another; but, after we shall come into that future being, will cease to be useful. As long as we stay in this world, we are all of us mere children in wisdom: and as a man grown up to maturity despises the sentiments of his childhood; so we, when we have attained the true maturity of our being, shall reflect upon that knowledge, which now is so apt to make us vain, as trivial and contemptible.

At present, truth is hard to be found; the faculties we employ in the search of it, are fallible and weak; and many intermediate obstacles prevent our clear perception of divine things: but when we shall arrive in the world of light, all these difficulties will vanish, and we shall know the most sublime truths with as much familiarity and certainty, as we do now each others faces: then shall faith be lost in vision, and hope in fruition; but Charity shall still abide.

Of these three therefore, Charity is, beyond dispute, the most excellent; forasmuch as faith and hope, as soon as they shall have assisted us
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in obtaining eternal bliss, will immediately vanish and die away. Whereas Charity not only is a necessary preparation for immortal happiness, but also makes a principal part of it, and lives for ever with it.

Thus we have followed the apostle in describing the Excellencies of this divine principle. From what has been said, let us learn, first, to guard against the error into which the Corinthians were fallen, who, it should seem, were so transported with the admiration of spiritual gifts, as to overlook and neglect Charity, the best and most valuable of all endowments. I am afraid we are, many of us, too apt to prefer the abilities of the head to the goodness of the heart, in our judgments, both concerning others and ourselves. If we find a man possessed of a considerable share of wit and knowledge, if he appears to have a large acquaintance with divine and human things, if he can also express himself with a ready and graceful eloquence; this we admire as an extraordinary man: and yet, if this extraordinary man be void of Charity, he is nothing before God; and his superior talents may only qualify him for doing the greater mischief in society. His wit and eloquence may perhaps be employed in pleasing mankind to their own hurt, in order to gain profit or honour to himself; in overbearing the modest, abusing the innocent, defending injustice, propagating falsehood, or riveting upon men the chains of slavery and superstition. In this case he is worse than nothing, and, in the sight of God, infinitely

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nitely inferior to any charitable soul that, with common understanding, sincerely endeavours to serve mankind, and do all the good it can in the world.

We may observe hence, in the second place, that faith alone is not sufficient to salvation. Too many seem to lay the whole stress of religion upon a right belief; and are persuaded, that if their faith be sound and orthodox, nothing more is necessary to secure the favour of God, and eternal life: but here you have the word of an inspired apostle for it, *That if you have all faith, so that you could remove mountains, and have no Charity, you are nothing.*

Again, thirdly, When we are assured by the apostle himself, that the greatest knowledge in this world is but seeing through a glass darkly; (and we must all own, that we have but faint glimmerings and earnest of better understanding hereafter) how can it possibly enter into the heart of a Christian to be inflamed with rage towards other Christians for differing from him in points of religion? The wisest among us cannot say, that the difference between him and his brother, is between the knowing and the ignorant; and not between two persons who quarrel, because they are not in the same error. It was therefore justly said to a warm man, who, being in dispute with one that dissented from him, called him heretick; "the worst of all hereticks is the uncharitable man."

But lastly, the best use we can make of what has been said, is, that we be each of us

is persuaded to cultivate Charity in our own tempers. Let us see what improvement we have made in this excellent virtue, by considering what influence it has upon our minds and actions. To be satisfied I have it in a due degree, it is not sufficient that I dispense of my fortune to the indigent; for this I may do out of ostentation and vanity: it concerns me therefore to examine, whether I am liberal, not from these mean principles, but from sincere benevolence? Am I patient when I am offended, and have power to be avenged? Am I free from envy, where I am excelled by such as I can never equal? Am I free from vanity, for the little good of which I am conscious I am possessed? Am I unaffected, and from pure good-will obliging to all the world? Am I more solicitous to do men good, than to please them, and be admired by them? Do not I arrogate too much to myself? Am I not moved with slight provocations? and apt to entertain unjust suspicions? Do I never rejoice in men's faults and miscarriages? Am I more apt to be pleased with their virtues and perfections? When I can suffer hardships, and chearfully endure calamities, for the sake of my fellow-creatures, I am endued with Charity. If I am possessed of this, I am master of that which will last for ever: if I am destitute of it, though my knowledge be ever so extensive, my faith sound, and my hope confident; all these will be unprofitable to me; my faith and knowledge at last will avail me nothing, and my hope vanish in despair.

S E R M O N IX.

On religious Gratitude.

By the Rev. Mr. BOURN.

PSALM ciii. 2.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all
his benefits.*

AS the exercise of Gratitude, in return for benefits received, is most natural and agreeable to every ingenuous mind; so the most engaging character, in which we can consider the Supreme Being, is that of a benefactor. Sovereign authority may command obedience; and the idea of Almighty power enforce it: infinite grandeur and dignity of nature may impress awe: and infallible and all-comprehensive wisdom create admiration or astonishment: and other attributes may properly excite religious veneration. But goodness alone attracts love; and benefits received are the only foundation of Gratitude. And, as the displays of infinite power and wisdom throughout the structure of the world are not more obvious to reason, or more the subject of human experience,

ence, than the effects of divine goodness; so every person in the world hath reason to say with the Psalmist, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*

In recommending the cultivation and exercise of religious Gratitude, let us first consider the divine goodness, and the benefits flowing from it, which we have actually experienced. Secondly, the meanness and odiousness of ingratitude. Thirdly, the excellence and advantages of religious Gratitude.

First, let us attend to the divine goodness, and the benefits flowing from it, which we have experienced in life.—We have sufficient ground to believe, that the effects of that perfect and unlimited goodness, which is attributed to the Supreme Being, are adequate to the perfection of that attribute; i. e. are infinite and endless. But as we are able to discern or understand but a small part, (nothing indeed comparatively) of the exertions of infinite wisdom and power; so we are capable of and fitted to enjoy the happy effects of divine goodness, only in the like imperfect and narrow proportion. Indeed no species of living creatures are entirely destitute of their Maker's goodness: they all enjoy the things proper to their nature and state of life; and are produced into being for some beneficent purpose. Much more is the happiness of mankind an object of the divine regard and attention. And we have abundant experimental proofs to convince us of it: For the effects are proportionate to the natural capacities, the moral qualities, and external

situation of mankind: while at the same time there are numberless other states and worlds, in which the divine goodness is infinitely augmented or diversified.—As the sun shines perpetually with the same lustre and heat, though the nations of men partake variously of the benefits of it, according to the different climates of the earth, and many objects arise to intercept its influence, and the earth itself interposing occasions nocturnal darkness; so the goodness of the Supreme Being is in itself perfect and invariable, though the effects of it are diffused with an infinite variety, and in different proportions to his several creatures; though the happy influence of it is frequently intercepted by many calamities and evils; and though human mortality seems to put a period to our enjoyment of it.

But whatever agreeable speculations or probable conjectures we may entertain concerning the unknown effects of divine goodness in other states and superior worlds; yet the beneficial effects which we have observed and experienced are the only ground and motive of our Gratitude: and it is our part to consider our own state, and to reflect upon the advantages we enjoy, and the blessings we derive from the divine favour to ourselves: — not to ourselves exclusive of mankind around us, who are formed of the same nature, placed in the same state, and equally the creatures of God and the objects of his care and goodness with ourselves. For those benefits which we enjoy in common with others, our fellow-creatures, fellow-subjects,

jects, and fellow-Christians, are the most proper ground of praise and gratitude to our common Lord and benefactor.—It is the temper of many to put the least value upon those blessings which they partake of in common with many others, and to turn all their attention to some peculiar endowments or advantages which they fancy themselves to be possessed of above others, or some extraordinary mercies or blessings which they have singly obtained. Nothing strikes their attention but what is peculiar and singular : nothing moves their gratitude but something which they can appropriate to themselves, exclusive of their fellow-creatures. Life, health, food, raiment, rest, the light and warmth of the sun, the wide prospect of the creation, friends and relatives, are trivial blessings in their esteem, and excite no grateful reflections ; only because they are common to mankind in general. This is the effect of vanity and self-partiality ; by which men are willing to confine the infinite goodness of God to themselves, and value it only as far as they imagine it to be so confined. And many Christians have suffered this selfish and narrow disposition to taint and vitiate the very principles of their Christian faith, and tempt them to appropriate the saving mercy of God in Christ Jesus to themselves ; and to esteem the gospel principally because they imagine it to contain a scheme of salvation calculated for their own party, exclusive of the rest of mankind. But we may justly observe, that as all men are strictly speaking unworthy of that divine goodness

which they actually enjoy; so such selfish persons are of all men the most unworthy; and they who are so willing to exclude their fellow-creatures from the benevolent and merciful regards of their common Creator, do most of all deserve to be excluded from it themselves.

In considering then the grounds of our religious praise and Gratitude to God, let us not dwell so much on any particular and extraordinary events, in which the divine providence hath seemed to distinguish us from others: for it is the property of weak and vain minds to arrogate to themselves such distinctions. But let us consider the divine bounty as the spring of universal good, as the fountain which diffuseth its streams throughout the whole habitable world, enriching the earth, and refreshing its numberless inhabitants. And if we enjoy a greater plenty than others, either of the temporal or spiritual means of happiness; let this only serve to increase our Gratitude, and excite also our benevolent desires and prayers, that all men may partake in an equal or superior degree of every blessing which the providence of God hath conferred upon us.

In reflecting upon the common benefits and satisfactions of life, and the constant and general effects of divine goodness, we may find an ample subject of religious praise and Gratitude. — The whole happiness of life; every thing valuable and delightful; whatever is grateful to human sense, great or amiable to the view, or engaging to the affections; whatever informs the

the understanding, entertains the imagination, or meliorates the temper; whatever restrains vice and promotes virtue; whatever mitigates disease, preserves health, or invigorates the faculties; whatever allays discord, cements society, and establisheth social and relative bliss;—these are all particular effects of that most impartial, unconfined and invariable goodness of God, who is benevolent to all, *and whose tender mercies are over all his works.* When in the cheerful light of day we view the ample creation around us; does not its very countenance bespeak the goodness, as well as the power and grandeur of the Creator? It is his goodness, which makes heaven and earth to smile upon us; glows in the sun, refresheth in the breeze, distils in the fruitful rain, and ascends in the copious harvest. His bounty continually gives food to the hungry, cloathing to the naked, health to the sick, and rest to the weary. He supplies the vital current of life, and pours the tide of joy into the human heart. His wisdom formed and ballanced the elements of the world, and made them subservient to the production and preservation of human life. His providence planned the constitution of human society, made man allied to man, and implanted in the human breast the pleasing affections of friends and kindred. The most engaging ties of nature, the tenderest and strongest emotions of parental affection, are an effect and image of his supreme and paternal goodness. And as this life, and whatever administers to the comfort and happiness of it, are the
fruits

fruits of his beneficence; so all our hopes of another life, and of happiness in a world to come, are wholly founded in his original love and mercy to mankind. The same power, wisdom and goodness which formed the earth and the whole heavens, and which made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the whole face of the earth, established also that constitution which the Christian revelation discloseth to us, according to which all mankind are raised from the dead by the power of the *Saviour of the world*, and endless life and happiness allotted to all good men.—If our knowledge of the gospel served to no other happy end, than to rescue us from the slavish superstition of popery, or the stupid idolatry and the impure and barbarous rites of heathenism; how much reason should we have to congratulate ourselves, and acknowledge the favour of divine providence on that account! How much more; when it dispels the gloomy shades of death, and opens to us a prospect into a future state! when instead of the perplexing uncertainty or dark despair which oppressed the human mind, it raiseth us to so great and joyful hopes of the event of things after death, and of a glorious renovation of the state of mankind; when justice and clemency shall be administered in perfection, all the evils of this world abolished, and virtue and happiness for ever established! What returns of praise and Gratitude are due to the eternal giver of all life and happiness; who hath added to the provision, which his indulgent providence hath made for our infant-state

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in this world, the inestimable assurance of a world to come, and the inheritance of eternal life!

Having thus far represented the benefits derived to us from the divine goodness, which are proper to excite our religious Gratitude; let us in the next place attend to the meanness and odiousness of ingratitude.—This is indeed a vice so universally detested, that there is little need of arguments to expose, much less to aggravate it. The very idea of it gives immediate offence, and the experience of it never fails to raise resentment. It is contrary to the strongest dispositions of an ingenuous and liberal mind; and even they who are capable of allowing it in themselves, abhor it in others. Where-ever men confer benefits, they naturally expect some acknowledgment in return, and to discover a sensibility of kindness in the receiver. And nothing so effectually damps the spirit of generosity, and stops the course of beneficence, as the ingratitude of those who are obliged. Especially, after various favours, a continued course of kindness, and repeated endeavours to please and benefit, to meet notwithstanding with a stupid indifference, or unnatural enmity in return, creates the strongest and justest sense of resentment; as it discovers the utter unworthiness of the receiver, and his insensibility of all obligations. How does the parent find himself affected, when all his tender cares and unwearied endeavours for the welfare of his children, are repaid with contempt or abuse? How does the friend, who hath hazarded fortune

time or life for another's safety or benefit, resent his enmity or ingratitude? — This vice comes the nearest to that of unprovoked malice and cruelty; and next to that, is the greatest reproach to a reasonable being. Other faults and vices men are drawn into by the power of temptation, and the strength of their natural passions or appetites: but where are the temptations to ingratitude? The sentiments of nature, and the impulses of honest affection, are strong inducements to the contrary, and create a propensity to be grateful. How unnatural and depraved then is that mind, in which every spark of Gratitude is extinguished! which no goodness can oblige, no kindness move, no benefits engage!

It must indeed be confessed, that men often confer benefits from motives of vanity or interest, and without any real benevolence to those who receive them: and in such instances the motives of Gratitude are in proportion diminished. Or they may expect, under a colour of Gratitude, unreasonable and disproportionate returns; or may demand slavish or vicious compliances. — But in regard to the Deity, who is perfect in goodness, and *who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not*, no such impediment can possibly arise to obstruct or diminish our Gratitude. The benefits which he confers proceed from the most pure and disinterested benevolence: and the returns which he requires are the most easy and advantageous to ourselves. To serve him is our most perfect freedom; and to adore and praise him for his goodness, our
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most natural duty. — What can be easier than to give him thanks, and to receive his favours and enjoy them with grateful hearts? The debt of Gratitude is indeed endless; “still owing, “still to pay: but a grateful mind in owing, “owes not, and is at once indebted and discharged.” The duty of Gratitude can never cease; because the goodness is endless which obligeth: but this is no less our happiness than our duty. — How then can men be continually receiving gifts and blessings from the hand of God, yet have no sense of his goodness, nor ever return the acknowledgments due to their divine benefactor? How can they, in the midst of prosperity, when all nature smiles upon them, when they are surrounded with grateful objects, and a confluence of delights is flowing in upon them; forget the fountain whence these streams of life and happiness proceed, and be unmindful of that God *who is giving them all things richly to enjoy?* Whence comes it to pass, that they are then most negligent of the Deity, and are the least willing to remember him? — But when the scene is changed, when distress and anguish come upon them, when they are surrounded with dangers and alarmed with fears, then and then only they begin to think of religion, become sensible of that power which made them, implore the protection of his providence, and fly to his goodness, as their last and only refuge? — So the froward and pampered youth despises the indulgence of his parents, nor thinks himself obliged by their goodness: but when terrified
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by danger, or afflicted by disease, immediately calls on them for help and succour, and trusts himself to their care alone.—But how weak and vain is it, how unbecoming our reasonable nature, how disingenuous and contrary to the dispositions of a worthy mind, to shew no Gratitude in return for the greatest benefits! to have the less sense of divine goodness, the more we experience of it! to be most unthankful for those blessings which occur the most frequently and in the greatest abundance! and at the same time most readily to acknowledge God when he withholds his favours, and inflicts chastisements upon us; and trust entirely to his goodness, when we have entirely forfeited it! to be atheists while God is showering down his blessings upon us; and to grow religious and devout when he hath taken them away! How servile, mean and odious is this temper; which is only to be driven by fear, and can never be won by goodness!

Let us attend also, on the other hand, to the excellency and happy effects of a grateful disposition towards the Supreme Being.—As ingratitude is the vice of ignoble minds, and which none but mean and selfish spirits are capable of; so Gratitude is the spontaneous produce of a worthy mind, and always takes root and flourisheth in a generous heart. The more goodness men have in themselves, they are usually the more sensible of goodness in others, and the more attracted by its influence; and when they find themselves the objects of it, are the more easily and strongly affected with grateful sentiments.

ments. While they whose hearts are strangers to generous principles and affections; and who are themselves destitute of goodness, are wilfully blind to it in others, and often endeavour to traduce and vilify it. Hence they become insensible of obligations; and either have no Gratitude, or endeavour to weaken the sense and loosen the ties of it, by ascribing the benefits they have received from others to any other motive rather than that of benevolence or generosity.

And the effects are as different as the temper and principles of mind from which they spring. — Ingratitude is usually accompanied with envy and discontent: while a grateful temper is best qualified both to enjoy its own peculiar blessings, and to participate in those of others. The ungrateful man never thinks that God or men have been sufficiently kind and liberal to him; or that he is obliged by any benefits conferred, while any are withheld; and is thankful for nothing, because he has not every thing. Instead of enjoying his own possessions, he envies those of others. Instead of thinking himself happy that Heaven has bestowed so much upon him, he is unhappy because it has bestowed no more. Nothing can satisfy his ungrateful and discontented mind, unless all mankind would bow down before him and serve him, and heaven itself would exhaust its boundless treasures to enrich and bless him alone, exclusive of the world beside. — But a man of a grateful temper is easily satisfied, and well-disposed for happiness. He is pleased with the good

good will and service of his fellow-creatures; without forming unreasonable expectations from them; enjoys the gifts of divine providence; without repining for what it has not given; is happy in his own advantages; without envying those of others; has the higher relish of every blessing the more common it is to others; and contemplates the divine goodness with the greater delight the more it appears to be diffused throughout the world and extensive as the creation. Instead of engrossing to himself the divine favour and liberality, he is struck with a grateful astonishment, that so insignificant a creature as himself is an object of the care and goodness of an infinite being: and that amidst the immense grandeur and multiplicity of the works of God, and the innumerable superior and more worthy objects of his regard, himself should nevertheless enjoy so large a proportion of the divine bounty: and that, while the wants and desires of millions of creatures in various states and worlds are to be supplied out of the stores of nature, yet the elements of the world and all nature around him, are, at the same time, formed with so wonderful a subservience to his own particular support and benefit. Much more, when he conceives of himself as designed for immortality; and is assured by the gospel, that the divine goodness to mankind in general, and to himself in particular, shall not terminate at death, but be inconceivably augmented, and endlessly diversified in the unknown scenes of the invifible and boundless universe; his heart becomes dilated

and animated with the highest esteem of the divine goodness, the warmest Gratitude for present benefits, and the most joyful hopes of future happiness. No transient clouds of adversity, no dark prospect of approaching disease or death, can destroy either his grateful remembrance of past mercies, or his hope of final deliverance and salvation.

To conclude : Gratitude is a debt due to every benefactor in proportion to the benefits we have received from him, and the benevolence of intention with which he confers them. The smallest favour merits a return of thanks : and the mere intention of obliging, separate from the act, deserves a grateful acceptance. Where benefits then have been actually conferred, and of the most substantial and valuable nature ; where favours have been multiplied and incessantly repeated, all proceeding from the purest motive of benevolence and the wisest regard to our welfare and happiness ; there the obligations to Gratitude are proportionably enhanced. But the divine benefits, we are certain, can proceed from no other motive than that of perfect goodness ; and comprehend, in number and value, all, and much more than we can possibly receive from any other benefactors. And in God, the sovereign Author of all good, all the most respectable and engaging characters among men, of protector, governor, Saviour, friend, and father, are united.— If Gratitude then be due to any earthly benefactor, or in return for any gifts which men can bestow ; how much more to him, whose instruments they

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are, who is the giver of all things, the original author of every blessing, by whatever person or medium it is conveyed to us? — Nothing then can be more becoming us, or conduce more to our advantage and happiness, than to cultivate a grateful affection towards the best of beings, in return for the numberless and various instances of his goodness to us; and as a qualification for receiving more and larger effects of his favour. To this we are excited, not only by a sense of duty, but by the ties of nature, the motives of ingenuity, the pleasure of a grateful mind, and the hopes of happiness.

Let us then frequently call to mind, and gratefully celebrate, the constant series and numberless effects of the divine goodness, to ourselves in particular, and to mankind in general. Let us constantly and cheerfully pay our public tribute of homage, adoration, and thanksgiving to our common Creator and benefactor. *Let us now magnify the Lord, and exalt his name together; let us give thanks unto him, and bless his holy name: let us sing praises to our God, and extol him in the congregation of the people. O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.* And let every one say to himself with sincere and fervent Gratitude. *Bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits.*

S E R M O N X.

On religious Joy.

By the Rev. Mr. B O U R N .

P H I L I P . i v . 4 .

*Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say,
Rejoice.*

AMONG the excellent instructions and precepts of our holy religion, we find intermixed many persuasions to *rejoice*; not only to banish care, fear, and sorrow, but to be always joyful; and even in the adversities of life, to be not only patient and contented, but *exceeding glad*. Joy is represented as one of the essential characters of the Christian religion: *For the kingdom of God* (says the apostle) *i. e. the Christian Religion, is righteousness, peace, and Joy in a holy spirit, i. e. a holy and spiritual Joy.* And again, *The fruit of the spirit is love, Joy, peace, &c.* And this character of our holy religion may be thought so peculiar, and so strongly descriptive of its particular genius and quality, as to distinguish it from all other religious institutions, or schemes

of morality, that ever were propagated in the world.

The Jewish religion was not of so liberal and elevated a spirit. It enjoined or permitted a train of servile ceremonies; was enforced only by political and worldly motives, separate from all the encouraging hopes of a life to come; and tended rather to contract the heart of man with superstitious fears, than to dilate it with courage and joy: whence it came to pass, that the Jews in general were of a narrow, selfish, and gloomy disposition.

The stoic philosophy taught men rather to extirpate than to govern their passions. And though it contained many excellent precepts, and arguments to expel fear, grief, and all uneasy and turbulent passions, and to maintain a noble fortitude of mind, and indifference to pain and danger; yet at the same time, instead of cherishing, it tended to suppress all love, hope, and joy, to deprive the heart of man of its most natural and pleasing affections, and to fix it in a kind of stupid insensibility. It was in this respect a senseless scheme, and the virtue which it taught was that of a stone rather than of a man: and however it might suit some few persons of a very rigid and obdurate temper, was ill-adapted to human nature in general; and founded upon a proud imaginary idea of a man's self-sufficiency to his own happiness, exclusive of human society, and even independent of the supreme giver of all good. — But an apology may be justly made for these philosophers; who were many of them excellent men,
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and did much good in the world: viz. that they were destitute of those great discoveries of the divine goodness to men, and of a state of immortality, which are the glory of our religion, and the principal ground of our hope and joy.

It will be difficult to find any just apology for those Christians, who, notwithstanding the glad tidings of the gospel, and the sublime and joyful hopes it is proper to inspire, still continue to describe religion and virtue in offensive colours, and to shade the lustre of the gospel, with the dark ideas of their own cloudy imaginations: who have represented faith in unintelligible doctrines, implicit submission to human authority, useless ceremonies, needless austerities, monkish solitude and melancholy, hatred and abuse of our fellow Christians, and even grief, horror and despair, as constituent parts, or genuine effects of the Christian religion; and who have thus endeavoured to pervert that amiable religion, which ought to be the pleasure and Joy of our lives, into an object of terror, and an insupportable burden.—— No apology can be made for such persons but this: that the gross delusions of antichristianism have so possessed their minds, that the glorious light of the gospel cannot shine into them, to dissipate such collected clouds of ignorance and error.

Our blessed Saviour, amidst the various trials of his virtue, maintained a constant serenity of mind, together with a sensibility of all the affections belonging to human nature; admi-

nistred consolation and joy to his disciples, under their greatest fears and troubles ; dissuades them from indulging to care and sorrow ; and exhorts them, even when they should be persecuted for righteousness sake, to *rejoice and be exceeding glad*. And the apostles preserved this joyful spirit and temper, during the course of their ministry, notwithstanding the adversities and dangers to which they were exposed. Hence the apostle Paul describes himself as *sorrowful* with respect to his outward circumstances, but in regard to the state and temper of his mind, as *always rejoicing*. And the apostle James persuades the Christians, to whom he wrote, to esteem the very trials of their faith and virtue, as a ground of Joy. And the apostle Peter represents the Christians, to whom he wrote, as *greatly rejoicing* in their Christian profession ; though they were in consequence of it afflicted with various trials. And the writer to the Hebrews persuades them *to hold fast the rejoicing of their hope firm unto the end*. And in general, whenever the apostles speak of their own state and temper of mind, or of that of their Christian converts, as under the influence of the gospel-principles, they always describe it as happy, or full of consolation, peace, hope, and Joy. And whenever occasion led them to mention the gospel-revelation, and the purpose of divine wisdom and goodness, disclosed in it, they frequently break out into expressions of rapture and triumph. *O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? Thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory,*

victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. — Behold, says the apostle John, *what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us. For now are we the sons of God: not the forlorn out-casts of the creation, exposed to perish for ever at death, but the sons of God. And though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, we are assured, that when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him, shall partake of the same life, and state of happiness, which he enjoys: for our life, or future state, is hid with Christ in God. And he begins his first epistle with the most lively air of confidence and satisfaction. What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have viewed, what our hands have handled of the word of life, (referring to the appearance of our Lord after his resurrection) for the life, or the state of immortality, is discovered, and we have seen it, and bear witness of it, and declare to you, that immortal life, which was with the Father, and which is now discovered to us. What we have seen and have heard therefore we declare to you, that you may hold communion with us: and our communion is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ. And we write these things to you, that your Joy may become compleat. In like manner St. Peter:— That the trial of your faith, being more precious than of gold, may be found to your praise, honour and glory, at the appearance of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen you love, and in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing ye rejoice, with a Joy inexpressible and full of glory.*

Hence the apostles elegantly stile themselves, *not lords of the faith* of the Christian converts, *but helpers of their Joy*.

It is abundantly evident from these passages, and the whole tenor of the New Testament, that the proper effect of the true principles of the Christian religion, is not to inspire grief or terror, but satisfaction and Joy. And we shall proceed in what follows, to explain the ground and reason of the apostle's exhortation in the text, *Rejoice in the Lord always*; which he repeats with a particular emphasis, *and again I say, Rejoice*.

Virtue is, undoubtedly, in some measure, its own reward. Innocence and goodness are in themselves a natural ground of satisfaction and pleasure: not only as the mind is preserved from the perplexities and miseries of conscious guilt; but as it becomes possessed of those good dispositions, the exercise of which contributes greatly to the happiness of life. Nothing affords greater delight to a generous mind than the exercise of social and benevolent affections: and there is a satisfaction and Joy arising from true virtue, which far excels the pleasures of voluptuousness, ambition, or avarice: but virtue, unsupported by a belief of true religion, is unstable and precarious; and all the courage and hope it can possibly afford, are liable to be overborn by various accidents. The calamities of life, the fears of death, the wickedness of men, the ingratitude of some, the malice of others, the adversities and oppressions to which it is often exposed in this
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state of trial, are sufficient to blast it, and prevent all the fruits of peace and Joy it might otherwise produce. In such inclement seasons, religion alone is capable of supporting the generous plant, and giving it sufficient strength and warmth, to bring forth fruit to perfection. Exclusive of all confidence in God, and all hope of a life after death, how narrow and circumscribed must our largest views and expectations be! No prospect interrupted by the many unpleasing accidents, which may befall us in life, and shortly terminated by the blank period of death, can afford any solid contentment and hope, to the mind of a wise and good man,

Let us then proceed, in the next place, to the belief of natural religion, or a confidence in the wisdom, power, and goodness of the sovereign disposer of all things: which is a further ground of satisfaction to a good man, and which strengthens virtue, and adds to the happiness arising from it.

There is upon the whole so great a prevalence of order and good in the world around us, even within our narrow observation and experience, as affords an undeniable evidence, that the Maker of it is a being of perfect goodness, as well as wisdom and power. It is also reasonable to believe, that the infinite wisdom of God may conduct his creatures, to the ends for which he designed them, and to their own greatest happiness, by ways and means mysterious to our apprehension; that those things may be good in his unerring judgment, which to our partial imaginations appear

pear evil ; and that his infinite power can convert those events, which seem the most formidable and hurtful, into real advantages, and the means of our happiness. These considerations are sufficient to remove all objections against his government, and enable us to confide in his supreme wisdom and goodness, notwithstanding all the apparent evils of the present state.

This belief of natural religion is a firm ground of contentment, and is sufficient to dispel anxiety, and to gladden the heart of a good man. Having our minds free from all distrust of the divine justice and goodness, and being thoroughly persuaded, that all things past, present, and to come, are directed by infallible wisdom to the happiest ends ; we may rejoice in God, and contemplate his works with admiration and pleasure. The whole creation around us will appear no less delightful, than great and astonishing. We shall contemplate ourselves with a secret satisfaction, as being the creatures of such a being : and our greatest terror will be, lest we should forfeit his protection, and the being he hath given us, and cease to be his creatures any longer.

And this faith of natural religion will afford yet more ample materials of comfort and Joy, if, instead of confining our views to present and sensible things, we extend them into remote spaces and ages, and endeavour to enlarge our ideas of the divine intentions and operations : if instead of limiting almighty power by our narrow faculties and senses, and infinite goodness by our little capacity and experience,

rience, we learn to conceive and believe, that all our knowledge of the works of God, is nothing in comparison of what they are in themselves: that infinitely more lies beyond, than within, the compass of our faculties: that the world we inhabit is not the only work of God; but that there are states and worlds innumerable, the produce of infinite wisdom and power: that there are creatures of God, who excel us in their knowledge, dignity, and happiness, far more than we excel the meanest insect: and that the same power of God, which created us to the enjoyment of this life, can raise us after death to another life, and a state of happiness above our present experience or conception. We are ignorant of those various and superior states of existence, which are in the power of omnipotence to confer, and which some orders of rational beings may actually possess. Instead, therefore, of measuring the effects of infinite power, by our ignorance and inexperience, we ought rather to conclude, that our highest conceptions of the works of God, and the ends of his wisdom and goodness, fall infinitely short of their excellence and perfection: and that the happiness of mankind in this life is indeed an object of the divine intention; but not worthy to be compared to those far more glorious and beneficent ends, which are intended and accomplished, in God's creation and government of the boundless universe.

This world and the state of mankind in it, may not only bear a relation to other states

and worlds in the visible creation, as being one proper part of a vast system too great to be comprehended by our imagination: but may also stand connected with an invisible intellectual system, and with future ages, and the distant periods of eternity. And the grand purpose of the Creator in the formation of mankind, may lie far beyond the narrow scope of our present experience and observation: and considering human happiness as one object of the divine purpose; yet the situation of mankind on earth, and their enjoyment of this life, may be but a diminutive part of that divine purpose, introductory to future scenes, and higher spheres of capacity, action and enjoyment.

Such considerations as these, will not only elevate the mind, with more sublime and pleasing apprehensions, of the works and designs of the all-perfect being; but lead us to place a more entire confidence in his wisdom and goodness; to resign ourselves to his disposal, both in life and at death, with complacency and satisfaction; not without some probable hope, that death may not be the period of our existence, but a translation to some better and happier state.

But in the third place, the largest and firmest foundation of hope and joy, to the mind of a good Christian, is the faith of the gospel. As it not only enlarges and confirms our best sentiments, of the power, wisdom, justice, and goodness of the supreme governor of the universe, and the grandeur and benevolence of his designs; but gives us the joyful assurance, That
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the eternal happiness of good men after death is one special object of his intention, and the principal end, for which our Saviour was sent into the world, and raised after death to power and dominion, in the invifible regions. He is difclofed to us, in a character and office moft proper to engage our efteem, to animate our love of virtue, and to encrease our courage and hope. We have in him the moft perfect example of every human virtue, and the higheft instance and proof of the intention of the Almighty Governor of the world, to raife mankind to another life, and to reward virtue with everlafting honour and happiness. That *life and immortality* which is fo clearly *brought to light*, and fo fully confirmed to us, by the refurrection of our Saviour, is the moft interefting fubject to which we can turn our attention, and the higheft object of our hopes: nothing greater or happier can enter into human conception: this eftablifheth our peace and joy on a perfect foundation, and enableth us *to rejoice in the Lord always, even with a joy inexpressible and full of glory.*

There are two different views of the ftate of mankind; one exclusive, and the other inclusive of a life to come. Which is the more pleafing and delightful view, can hardly need argument or explication, in order to convince a rational enquirer. Had the Almighty Creator no further design in the formation of mankind than their prefent fubfiftence in this world, it would be hard to reconcile this purpofe alone, with his infinite wifdom and goodnefs: and was death the period of our exiftence, and the
happiness

happiness of this life the ultimate object of our hope, there would be apparent reason to cry out, *All is vanity*. Since all our present enjoyments, hopes and prospects would be diminishing through life, and soon terminate in everlasting darkness and insensibility. This view is not only ungrateful to the thoughts of a wise man, but more proper to debase the mind, and damp the spirit, than to encourage it in a virtuous pursuit, of any worthy and happy ends. It is hardly credible, that any persons in the world can be sunk into such meanness and folly, as to wish that death may put an end to their being, and to derive ease and contentment from such a miserable expectation.—They are terrified at the apprehensions of that state, which in itself affords the most glorious and delightful prospect; and pervert that into a subject of aversion and horror, which ought in reason to be the delight of their hearts, and the ground of their most grateful praises to God, and most joyful hopes in regard to themselves. They have recourse to that as their last and best refuge, which every sensible mind must naturally abhor, and startle at the thoughts of; even that total and eternal destruction, which the gospel denounceth to be the final punishment of wicked men; when they shall be extirpated out of the creation, *from the presence of the Lord, and by his glorious power*. Such a dread at the thought of another world, can be the effect only of conscious guilt, or of false conceptions of God, and a dark distrust of his wisdom and goodness. Such persons labour under most unhappy prejudices,

judices, and substitute fear instead of faith, and horror instead of hope. The face of universal nature is obscured to their eyes, while they are afraid to extend their view beyond the limits of this life, and are struck with terror at the belief of a future existence. The gospel itself, instead of being *tidings of great joy* to them, is unwelcome news; and they prefer the darkest prospect of an eternal death, to that *day-spring from on high which brings life and immortality to light*.

In reason all our fear should lie on the contrary side: and our most formidable apprehensions ought to be, lest the gospel should not be true; lest death should be the period of our existence, and prove to be in reality, what it is in appearance, a total and eternal death: lest all mankind should be involved in that destruction, which according to the gospel-doctrine, is to be the only end of the wicked and impenitent. And we ought in reason to desire nothing so earnestly, as to be thoroughly convinced, that the exceeding great and inestimable promises of a resurrection from the dead, and an eternal life, contained in the New Testament, are true.

To the atheist, who denies a God, and believes that mankind are the produce of chance; or to the dæmonist, who apprehends the cause of all things to be a malevolent being; the belief of a future state may indeed be dreadful: and it is no wonder if they are terrified at the thought of an eternal existence; as of an unfathomable chaos of confusion, — or an endless scene

scene of diabolic tyranny and cruelty. But these are not Christian, nor rational sentiments. It is our happiness to have juster notions of the all-perfect being, and the excellence of his works and designs, who is known to us in the character of *our Father in heaven*, a being of infinite goodness, as well as almighty power.

The heathens were not so happy, either in their conceptions of the divine nature, or their apprehensions of a future state. Instead of entertaining joyful hopes of a life to come, their notions of it were dark and fearful. Even the Elyzium which they feigned, as the residence and reward of virtuous souls, was a state so little desirable, that it was much happier in their opinion, to continue in this world, with all its troubles and adversities. Many of them indeed denied a future state: being more willing to believe that death put an end to their existence, than that such a state should follow hereafter. This was in reality making a poor retreat, and flying to a desperate refuge, when they preferred the belief of annihilation or an eternal destruction, as the best hope of what would befall them at death. One of their old poets pathetically laments this view of the state of mankind; and complains, that while the sun and the stars set and rise again, yet when man goes down to the grave, he sinks into everlasting night, and never riseth more: and that while the plants and flowers of the field obtain a kind of resurrection in the spring, yet the best of men must perish for ever without the least hope of a restoration to life.

“ Alas,

" * Alas, the tender herbs and flow'ry tribes,
 Tho' crush'd by winter's unrelenting hand,
 Revive and rise when vernal zephyrs call.
 But men, the brave, the mighty and the wise,
 Bloom, flourish, fade and fall: ——— and then
 succeeds
 A long, long silent dark oblivious sleep,
 A sleep which no propitious pow'r dispels,
 Nor changing seasons, nor revolving years."

But the Christian revelation gives us the inestimable assurance, That there is a propitious power, able and ready to deliver men from the power of death, and raise them to another life: that there shall be a revolution, when *they that sleep in the dust shall awake, and all that are in their graves shall hear the reviving voice of the Son of God, and shall live.* Ye are not ignorant, says the apostle, as the heathens are, concerning them which are asleep: and therefore ye ought not to sorrow, like those that have no hope. For if ye believe that God raised up Christ from the dead; even so them that sleep in Christ will God bring together with him.

The nature of a future state cannot but surpass our comprehension. The apostle compares our present ideas of it to those of an infant in comparison of mature age: and says, that *we now see such things but through a glass darkly; i. e. by an obscure and distant reflection.* It doth not yet appear, says the apostle John, *what we shall be:* but this we are assured of; *that when Christ shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him*

* Mosch. epit. on Bion.

as he is, i. e. our faculties will be then adequate to that exalted state in which he is. Our blessed Saviour assures us of the same: *In my Father's house, saith he to his disciples, are many mansions; i. e. there are various states and regions in the invisible universe. I am going to prepare a place for you: and when I have prepared a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

Thus, as the discoveries of natural philosophy open the minds of the learned, to contemplate the material worlds, in the distant spaces of the skies, and the scenes of divine power and wisdom there displayed; so the Christian revelation opens the eyes of our faith, to discern the intellectual worlds, and a future state of glory and immortality. These things are indeed remote from human sense, and the comprehension of them is above our highest faculties. For how is it possible that we should comprehend the operations and effects of infinite power and wisdom? — And what can be more absurd than to imagine that they are limited by the narrow dimensions of the human understanding? — The future state is revealed to our knowledge, as far as is necessary, and for ought we know, as far as is possible. It may not be in the power of superior beings themselves, to communicate to us a knowledge of their operation, and manner of their existence; mankind not having any faculties capable of receiving such information. God may impart to the higher orders of his creatures, various powers of per-

perception and action, not only different from ours, but such as may singly comprehend more, than all our capacities and senses united; and which may give them an excellence, in comparison of mankind, greater than that which men possess, compared to the meanest living creature on earth: and the happiness, resulting from such superior faculties, may excel, in the same proportion, all the enjoyments which men are capable of in this world.

Our Saviour and his apostles represent the happiness of the future state, by such images, as are not only most intelligible, but most apt to please and delight the mind of man: such as, *a treasure; an inheritance; a kingdom; a region of light and glory; a life exempt from disease and death; a state of society; a perfect community, consisting only of the wise and good, free from every imperfection which attended them in this world, and from all other infirmities and evils.*

Such a state is the noblest object of our desire and pursuit; and we have the highest reason to rejoice in this expectation. We cannot be more happily employed at present, than in considering the evidence and certainty of this our Christian faith; for it naturally tends to fill our minds with Joy: and we cannot but inwardly exult and triumph in the sublimest hope any mortal creature can conceive, the hope of immortality.

When men are deprived of many valuable enjoyments, and reduced to a state of infirmity and confinement; yet they are not willing to

part with life, but esteem it preferable, even in such a condition, to an utter insensibility or extinction of being. How happy then is it to be persuaded, that death itself shall not put an end to us, but only be a transition to another life. How vast and delightful a prospect does the belief of a future state afford! What a constant source of comfort and Joy to be assured, that we shall not only be set free by death from the evils of this life, but redeemed as it were from a state of slavery, to the freedom and inheritance of the sons of God: and instead of being reduced to our primæval nothing, shall become possessed of a superior life and nobler faculties; shall be able to extend our progress in the unbounded universe, and to contemplate those wondrous scenes which are continually passing, through infinite space and the ages of eternity; and instead of being excluded from human society, shall be joined to a celestial community, to *the spirits of just men made perfect*, and a higher order of beings, amongst whom mutual benevolence and social Joy are complete and uninterrupted.

Our blessed Saviour delivered instructions of wisdom, and precepts of morality, adapted to the nature and condition of mankind; and was himself a perfect example of every human virtue. But this was not the most important part of his commission, nor is it the greatest excellence of our religion. The authentic discovery and assurance of a life to come, and of glory and immortality as the reward of virtue, is the perfection and glory of the Christian religion: this

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is properly the Gospel: a doctrine of consolation, of hope, and of Joy inexpressible. He came with a certainty and authority which no other person ever had, to assure us of the intentions of divine goodness and mercy to men: to reveal and confirm to us the happiest tidings that can arrive to the ears of mortals, the promise of immortality: that the Almighty Father who made us, and *who hath appointed all men once to die*, doth not intend to destroy us at death, but *hath so loved the world* of mankind, that it hath been his eternal purpose to deliver them from death, and restore them to another life, and to reward virtuous men with endless honour and happiness: and that to this end he hath appointed a person worthy to execute the great design; and hath committed to him the power of raising mankind from the dead, the right of judging them, and the whole disposal and government of them in a future state. The gospel therefore dispels our most formidable apprehensions, and raiseth us to the highest hopes; by assuring us, that the total and eternal destruction, which all mankind would have had reason to live in fear of, shall be the fate only of the wicked and impenitent: whilst all good men, and even wicked men who sincerely repent, shall be saved; *shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*

There are but two sorts of persons in the world, who are incapable of deriving any satisfaction and hope from the gospel; and who, instead of rejoicing in the prospect of a future state, have reason to live in fear of what will follow after death; viz. the wicked man, and

the infidel. — The former, during his state of wickedness and impenitence, may and ought to be filled with terrible apprehensions. For the Father Almighty, even *the Father of mercies, the God of all consolation and good hope*, will nevertheless, according to the gospel of our Saviour, be *a consuming fire* to the workers of iniquity: they shall be *burnt up like chaff*, and their end shall be *eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power*. — The infidel may indeed be in a better situation; as he may, upon the principles of natural religion, live virtuously and piously, and avoid that wickedness and hypocrisy, which will expose the Christian to peculiar infamy and punishment. But at the same time, by rejecting the gospel, though it be in the sincerity of his heart, and because he apprehends it to want sufficient proof; he deprives himself of the best evidence of a life to come, and the most delightful ground of hope, as to his own future and eternal condition. He remains in a dark and uncomfortable state, or in the obscure twilight of human reason; which can make no clear and certain discovery of a life hereafter. He must of necessity either believe that he shall perish for ever at death, (a thought abhorrent to the mind of a wise man) or trust entirely to the strength of some feeble probabilities and plausible conjectures, concerning the purposes of infinite wisdom.

Indeed the ablest * of the deistical writers has been so honest as to confess all this, and

* Bolingbroke,

much

much more; by expressly owning, that the doctrine of a future state is absolutely uncertain and dubious, exclusive of the Christian revelation: and that a life to come, however desirable, is what we have no sufficient ground to expect.——It is well that this writer against Christianity has been so kind, as to inform us of his real sentiments, in this most momentous article of religion: for we may plainly see whether he would lead us, and to what issue his objections and arguments naturally tend. For having first attempted to deprive us of our Christian faith; the next step, and the natural consequence is, to rob us of the greatest consolation and joy of our minds, the blessed hope of a life to come, and of immortality after death.

——But having attained, by our knowledge and belief of the gospel, to this sublime and pleasing hope; we cannot willingly part with it, or suffer any slight objections to destroy our confidence in God, and our hope of enjoying the effects of his goodness in a life incorruptible and eternal. Were it possible that our Christian faith and hope should be all a delusion; it would be a kind of cruelty to deprive us of so noble and pleasing an expectation, so requisite to support us under adversity, to give us joy in prosperity, and to change the formidable aspect of our last enemy, death, into the countenance of a friend.

If, according to all human judgment concerning matters of the greatest consequence, even of life and death, the mouth of two or three witnesses of honest character is thought

sufficient to a decision; how vastly superior is that evidence, which determines our assent to the truth of the gospel, and on which our faith and hope in the divine promise of eternal life is founded? — What remains then in order to our entire satisfaction, but that we rightly understand, and cordially embrace the gospel of our salvation? — We have abundant reason to confide in the divine purpose of everlasting goodness and mercy to mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. *All flesh is indeed grass; and all the glory of man as the flower of grass: the grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth: our bodily nature is so far akin to the lower creatures, even the vegetables of the earth, that it must decay and fall like them. But the word of the Lord, the purpose and promise of God, abideth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. Let us then hold fast the profession of our faith, and the joy of our hope, firm unto the end; for faithful is he who hath promised. Let us endeavour to walk as becomes the heirs of the heavenly inheritance, the inestimable gift of eternal life. Having this hope in us, let us purify ourselves as Christ was pure: and according to his example, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality. Then may we have strong consolation in our own minds; and in all the events of this uncertain state, may rejoice in hope of the glory of God; in hope of seeing and enjoying the glorious effects of divine power, wisdom and goodness in the celestial regions, and to everlasting ages. Which God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

S E R.

S E R M O N XI.

The distinguished Honour of aged Piety.

Preached April 18, 1722, at the Funeral of
Mrs. H——.

By the Rev. Mr. PEIRCE.

PROV. xvi. 31.

*The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found
in the way of righteousness.*

THERE is no beauty or comeliness like that of holiness. Nothing tends more to adorn or recommend a person than this. And as 'tis natural to men to be concerned that they may make a seemly appearance, and they are commonly studious to adorn themselves as much, at least, as their circumstances will allow; so the Holy Ghost has recommended this to us, under the notion of a most excellent and comely ornament, which suits persons of any age or condition.

Thus is it represented in those who are young, Prov. i. 9. where the wise man, speaking
of

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of instructions to fear and serve God, when they are observed and practised by such as are in that age, says, *They shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck:* where he alludes to the ornaments of well set hair, and golden chains, and so declares the great seemliness of virtue for those who are young.

But the providence of God at present suggests to our consideration the suitableness of the same thing in those who are old; and the removal of an aged person from among us, calls upon such in a more especial manner to bethink themselves. And for this purpose I have chosen these words as the ground of my present discourse, *The hoary head is a crown of glory*, that is, 'tis a glorious crown, or like a noble and royal diadem, *if it be found in a way of righteousness.*

The words in the original being, as is usual in such proverbial speeches, somewhat abrupt and concise, there has been room left for a variety of sentiments, concerning the true rendering them.

Some think they are a proposal of the most likely course men can take to prolong their days; and therefore they thus render them: *The hoary head is a crown of glory, which is to be, or which shall be found or obtained in a way of righteousness.*

And this is agreeable to the fifth commandment, where a promise of long life is made to obedience; *Honour thy father and mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* To the like purpose the Psalmist

Psalmist commends virtue as the readiest way to prolong mens lives, Psal. xxxiv. 12, 13, 14. *What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile: Depart from evil, and do good: Seek peace and pursue it.* We can have but little reason to expect any particular favour from God in lengthening out our lives, if we are not careful to obey and please him.

Some think that the duty of the aged is here prescribed; and so they render the text thus: *The hoary head is a crown of glory, it must be, or, it should be found in the way of righteousness;* as though he had said, "Age is honourable, and "gray hairs are an ornament: but then those "who are thus aged, ought to be careful of "their duty, and not fail to be found them- "selves in the way of righteousness."

Our own translators have inserted the word *if* in their rendering, *if it be found in the way of righteousness*, and as there is nothing inconvenient in the sense they have expressed, or the manner of their rendering, I shall confine myself to it; and so the words declare to us, *That then is the hoary head more especially an ornament and glory, when 'tis found in the way of righteousness.*

There is somewhat venerable in old age; whence God joins the ancient and the honourable together, Isa. ix. 15. And he commanded in the old law that respect should be paid to such, Lev. xix. 32. *Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man.*
And

And Solomon tells us, Prov. xx. 29. *The glory of young men is their strength; and the beauty of old men is their gray head.*

Young men who are in the prime of their strength, are lively and fit for action; but the old, till their understanding becomes impaired, are supposed most fit for counsel, and so for rule and authority. A respect therefore and deference has by the wisest nations been reckoned due to their years. The Roman senate was originally composed of old men, and took its name from thence: and the council, or *γερονσία* among the Greeks, was of the same nature: and among ourselves one name of magistrates (aldermen) is derived from their age: and so among the Jews, their great council consisted of the elders of the people; and one proper name of the ministers of the gospel signifies an aged person.

But when men are old in righteousness as well as years, then is the hoary head indeed a crown of glory, a most excellent ornament that should command much respect and regard. And this I shall now endeavour to confirm by the following considerations.

I. Their knowledge may be supposed to be very considerable, by reason of the long time they have had for the acquiring it. Knowledge is not born with us, but is obtained by hearing, reading, and making observation. Herein men gradually improve: and therefore they may be supposed to have gained the most considerable stock of useful knowledge, who have had the longest time for it, provided they have made a good use of their time, as they must be supposed

to have done, who have chosen the way of righteousness. Hence when the apostle commends the young men for their strength, he commends the fathers for their knowledge, 1 John ii. 14. 'Tis the duty of fathers to instruct and teach their children: and God has provided this help for those who are young, and want understanding themselves; that they are to be guided by those who have had more time for the gaining knowledge and experience, and who by their natural affection, as well as his command, are obliged to give them the best instruction. See Deut. iv. 9, 10. It being so natural to suppose that knowledge should advance with age, Elihu very decently gave Job's friends the preference, *because they were elder than he*, Job xxxii. 4. and says he, ver. 6, 7. *I am young, and ye are very old: wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show you mine opinion: I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.* It must be a great reproach if such as are old are ignorant in matters of religion; if, *when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have need that one teach them again, which are the first principles of the oracles of God*, Heb. v. 12. And tho' there may be a great difference in persons, which may be owing to their different natural abilities, employments and opportunities, &c. yet there is no Christian who has set out early in religion, and has lived to a good old age, but he must have gained a considerable stock of knowledge by his own experience. Such a long life must furnish him with a great variety of observations concerning the methods of providence, the pleasure

sure of religion, and the course a Christian should take. The name that was at first given to the followers of the blessed Jesus, was that of disciples: and as no school is more profitable than Christ's, those who have been long in it, must be supposed to have made some considerable proficiency in knowledge and experience. They must have observed much of the goodness of God towards them, that has carried them through their prolonged lives; and the favourable turns of his providence toward them must have often sensibly affected them.

They have had a long time to be acquainted with the changes of the world, and to convince them of the uncertainty of all things here below, and to take notice of God's wise and righteous government over the world. They have had a long time to experience the *ways of wisdom* to be *pleasantness*, and *her paths peace*; to *taste and see that the Lord is gracious*, and that he is never wanting in his returns to them that faithfully serve him. Such a life as theirs must make them know much of the evil of sin, as that which offends God, causes him to hide his face, quenches his spirit, and breaks the Christian's peace.

'Tis common for young persons to think they know much; but length of time makes them ashamed of their former conceit; and then while they really improve in their knowledge, they are less puffed up with an opinion of it.

2. The virtue and sincerity of the aged is more tried and approved than of those who have but lately set out and engaged in religion.

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Length of time tries all things: and we can speak with more assurance and confidence of the goodness of any thing, when we have been convinced of it by a long experience. Such a thing, is a man ready to say, I have used for so many years; and it has proved well all the while, and therefore I dare warrant it to be good. And so 'tis in the case before us. 'Tis indeed a most excellent and pleasing thing to see persons set out well in religion, and particularly to behold those who are young applying themselves to mind spiritual and heavenly concerns: and every one who has the least degree of piety does, and cannot but rejoice at such a sight: but yet give me leave to tell such, that when we rejoice upon this account, we rejoice with trembling: we rejoice that such set themselves to this work; but we tremble, being afraid lest they should lay it aside again; and lest their goodness, like Ephraim's, *Hos. vi. 4.* should be *as the morning cloud, and as the early dew should go away.* We are not able to see into the secrets of persons hearts, and therefore can only judge by appearance: and though when we have a hopeful prospect, we rejoice; yet when we consider the many instances there have been of those who have made a flourishing show in religion for a while, and have afterwards utterly abandoned it; when we consider the many and powerful temptations such are like to meet with, how can we be otherwise than greatly concerned, and jealous for them? I would not that any should misunderstand me, as tho' I designed to discourage the endeavours of young persons. Far
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be it from me. May such go on and prosper! Would to God we could see their numbers increase! The proper use they are to make of this is, to be the more watchful and serious in the work; and therefore let them think that my aim is only the same with the apostle's, who says to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. iv. 14. *As my beloved sons I warn you.*

But now where persons have long chosen and walked in the paths of righteousness, and have expressed a constant regard to the Christian rule, and made it, as far as we can judge, the business of a long life to please and obey God; there we readily look upon the matter as past doubt or suspicion. Such a long course of piety and godliness that has weathered storms and difficulties, and has held out against all opposition from the devil, the world, and the flesh, is not so liable to be called in question, as that which is yet to encounter all these.

It was a prudent caution which the king of Israel suggested, 1 Kings xx. 11. *Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself; as he that putteth it off;* and very applicable 'tis in the present case. Those who are setting out in religion are like persons buckling on their harness to the combat; and when they do it resolutely and manfully, 'tis well; and they deserve much commendation and encouragement: but yet they are to acknowledge a great difference between themselves and such as are of a long standing, who have engaged the enemy, and stood their ground a great while, and are ready as it were to put off the harness, having gained the

the victory. When you set out you are following them; but it must be acknowledged at a considerable distance: and though you may hereafter, when you come to be of their standing, yet at present 'tis plain you have not reached to them. You have imitated them in their setting out; but you have their example to follow in holding on to a good old age, and spending your whole life in the service of God.

3. As the virtue and holiness of the aged is more tried and approved through their long standing, so 'tis to be supposed upon the same account to be more considerable in the measure and degree of it. Their perseverance does not only bespeak the sincerity of their faith, hope and love, but likewise a good improvement therein. These virtues are in their nature progressive: and the promise of God secures to such as keep his way a continual increase. *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.* Isa. xl. 31. God exercises a constant care over all sincere Christians to render them more and more fruitful, John xv. 2. And therefore the longer they have been under his care, the more considerable must their improvement be supposed to be.

There is a double improvement which we may suppose Christians to make; the one by becoming more confirmed and established in their holy religion; and the other by their abounding more in the fruits of righteousness. And this is agreeable to the representation which is sometimes made of good men in Scripture, as *trees of the Lord's planting*, which you

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know grow at the root as well as in the branches, according to that allusion of the prophet, Isa. xxxvii. 31. *The remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah, shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.* Now both these advantages are secured to sincere Christians in the use of their endeavours. The apostle supposes the faithfulness of God engages him to confirm and establish those who are called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. i. 8, 9. And their union with Christ the head, secures the other also: for from the head, that is Christ, *all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God*, Col. ii. 19. Whence the righteous are supposed continually to improve, and the path of the just is represented by the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day, Prov. iv. 18. Now if virtue and holiness are ornaments, as most certainly they are, when they are thus confirmed and increased by a long continuance under divine aids, they must be as a crown of glory, as a bright and noble diadem to adorn any person.

4. Such persons are eminent instruments of bringing glory to God, and of usefulness in his church. The more conspicuous the power of religion is in persons, the more is God glorified by them. *Herein*, says our Lord, John xv. 8. *is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.* And St. Paul assures us, Philip. i. 11, that the *fruits of righteousness*, wherewith Christians are filled, are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God. Now when is it that the power of religion

religion does most appear, but when it shines through a long and well ordered life and conversation, when it has been the governing principle of a man's actions from his youth unto old age, and has brought forth the fruits of righteousness all along therein? The excellency of a religious principle, together with the noble design of the Christian institution, does then very signally appear, when it regulates the whole course of a long life; curbing the disorderly affections of human nature, and overcoming the many and strong temptations of our spiritual adversaries, and manifestly subjecting the whole man to the guidance and government of the divine law.

The power of God's grace is by this means displayed, and a noble encouragement is given to others to mind religion, and to devote their lives to the service of God. Who can have the face to pretend that 'tis a vain thing to set about religion, and that the holiness required by the gospel is not to be attained by men, when he sees with his own eyes those who by the grace of God have attained it?

And as the efficacy of God's grace, so the goodness of his law, is nobly discovered by this means. There is a singular excellency in the law of God, which easily recommends itself to a well disposed mind that attentively considers it: but the generality of men are little inclined to such enquiries, and so easily overlook the goodness of the rule; but when 'tis copied out fairly, and drawn to the life in mens conversation, 'tis not easy to avoid observing how amiable and

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lovely it appears. And therefore such persons as have led long and exemplary lives, or *hoary heads found in the way of righteousness*, are ornaments to their holy profession, and a credit to the religion of the blessed Jesus: they take the course to shame those that would reproach it, and to *put to silence the ignorance of such foolish and unreasonable men*. Such persons shine as *bright lights in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation*; and while others behold *their good works*, they glorify their heavenly Father. By their conversation they testify the necessity of true piety, and that the favour of God is not to be expected in a dissolute and ungodly course of life.

Farther, by their watchfulness and diligence in religion, they are of eminent service in the places where they live; in as much as God has a particular regard to those who are thus devoted to his fear; and by their earnest seeking to him, and standing in the gap, they avert the judgments which the looseness and profaneness of others are pulling down.

In them is manifested the truth and faithfulness of God, as he appears to have made good to them those promises upon which they have depended. They are apt to speak of that loving kindness and truth which has so often affected them; and to own God's bounty and care in providing for them, and his faithfulness in afflicting them, and in giving them necessary aids and supports to carry them through the world. And were they to be silent, yet would the faithfulness of God appear in their perseverance, and the fruit-

fruitfulness of their old age; while they continue to serve and honour him in an age that is most unfit for service, and are made to abound in the fruits of righteousness, and flourish in their souls under the decays of nature and bodily strength. The Psalmist has taught us thus to make our observation of God's dispensations toward his people, Psal. xcii. 13, 14, 15. *Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age: they shall be fat and flourishing; to shew that the Lord is upright.*

And thus do they become a means of encouraging the fearful, and of strengthening the hands of the weak and feeble. It should be an encouragement to those who are setting out in religion when they behold those who have so long held on in it. Upon the same God who has upheld them may you depend, that he will likewise uphold and strengthen you. If you are sincere, the same promises that were made to them, are made to you; the same covenant that was their security shall be yours; and the same grace that was sufficient for them shall be for you also. And is it not the greatest glory to a person thus to bring honour to his Maker, and to be serviceable in his church? Then 'tis that a man does truly answer the end of his being, and lives to a good purpose; but without this, what good account can be given of him? And how useless and insignificant a creature is he in the world!

5. The hoary head that is found in the way of righteousness is ripe for glory, and just ready

to enter into it. To this purpose are the words of Eliphaz, Job v. 26. *Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season.* Aged Christians are come very near to the conclusion of their days, and their work of preparing for the other world is almost happily over: and they can have but a little while to continue out of that blessed place which they have set their hearts upon, and which they have been growing up unto.

And certainly the hoary head may be well considered in this respect as a crown of glory. If we have any value for the blessed inhabitants of the other world, the more persons resemble them, and the nearer they are to their being removed to their society, the more we ought to esteem them. To them then is the *hoary head a crown of glory*, whom God has brought to it through a course of righteousness; for 'tis a sign and indication that God is about to receive them to glory. The *hoary head* is a sign of their approaching dissolution; and because of its being *found in the way of righteousness*, 'tis a sign of the happiness of that change which they shall then make.

To these considerations I might add, for a farther illustration of the matter, that when God was pleased to afford his servant, in a vision some sensible and glorious representation of himself, he chose to do it in this manner, Dan. vii. 9. *I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool.* In like manner, when our blessed Saviour was beheld

beheld by St. John in a vision, Rev. i. 14. it was in this form: *His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.* So that the hoary head that is found in the way of righteousness, does resemble the ever blessed God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, by bearing what is their truest image, righteousness; and is moreover such, as if they were to make a sensible representation of themselves to us in our present state, they would choose; and therefore well may it be stiled *a crown of glory.*

Having thus cleared the assertion of the wise man in the text, I might draw various inferences from it. As,

1. I might hence infer the unreasonableness of that contempt that young persons sometimes shew to those who are old, mocking at their infirmities, and especially when they are good men. An instance we have of this, and the severe punishment of it, 2 Kings ii. 23, 24. where we read of forty-two children that were killed by two bears for mocking at Elisha, saying, *Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.* And 'tis the more unreasonable and heinous crime, when persons are guilty of this toward those to whom they are under special obligations; I mean toward their parents. God took care to secure the honour to be paid to them among the Jews, by a special commandment; and he that despises them not only sins against God, but really disgraces himself. 'Tis therefore good advice which Solomon gives, Prov. xxiii. 22. *Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.*

2. I might hence infer the reasonableness of that rule of the apostle, 1 Pet. v. 5. *Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.* They are your superiors, and a deference and regard is due to them as such. You are to give way to them, and let *days speak, and a multitude of years teach wisdom.* You are to hearken to their advice, and follow their example in what is good. God's providence has set a crown (and a crown of glory 'tis) upon their heads, and that should command your regard.

3. I might hence infer, how 'tis that persons should make preparation for the honour and comfort of old age, even by choosing the ways of righteousness while they are young.

But agreeably to the present occasion, I shall rather choose to address myself to the aged; both to those who are, and those who are not found in the way of righteousness.

1. As to those upon whom God has set such a crown of glory, and who are found in the way of righteousness, I would suggest the following particulars by way of advice.

1. I think nothing can be more proper for you, whose case this is, than to live much in the expectation of death. The hoary head is a plain indication and sign that death cannot be far off. The wise man in his elegant description of old age, calls the gray head the *almond tree*; and when that *flourishes*, and the *grasshopper* becomes a *burden*, a man cannot be far from his *long home*, Eccl. xii. 5. You, one would think, can have no room to flatter yourselves, as the young are very apt to do. You know that your

time

time cannot be long: you feel continual warnings by the manifold weaknesses and infirmities which old age brings along with it, that death, of which these are harbingers and forerunners, cannot be far behind. Nay, death is as it were actually attacking you, while it impairs your faculties, and wastes your strength. And does not this call upon you to think of it beforehand? Will you forget the grave, when you are just ready to fall into it, and find yourselves too weak to avoid stooping towards it? You see what holy Job's resolution was, chap. xiv. 14. *All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change shall come;* and much more when that change is near, and ready as it were to enter at the door, does it become you to live in the expectation of it.

2. Let it be now your care, in an especial manner, to have the evidences of your title to future happiness and glory as clear as possible. Certainly I need not urge this upon you with reasons and arguments; yourselves feel those which one would imagine should be more cogent than any I can use. Your manifold weaknesses and infirmities must convince you how much your circumstances need comfort; and so they may naturally quicken you to look after this, which you cannot but know to be, the best comfort of all.

Besides, is not this very requisite in order to your being able to meet death cheerfully, and without amazement? Use then the time that God gives you, to clear up to yourselves the state and condition of your souls, your interest in the promise

promise of a blessed reward, and your right to the glorious and eternal inheritance.

3. In order to this, labour now to be most abounding in all the fruits of righteousness, and to be doing all the good you can by the holiness and exemplariness of your lives and conversations, in that little time you have yet remaining. Your concern should be, that your last works may be your best. Glorify God then by all your words and actions; shew a resigned frame of spirit to the will of God, and patiently bear the infirmities you feel, and may farther expect; and hold on in the course which you have been hitherto following.

Take encouragement, your work is near done, and your warfare almost accomplished. And you have need now of only a little patience more; for yet a little while, and you shall be freed from all your infirmities and troubles, and be at rest. The dusk of that night that will put an end to your work, should quicken you to this. You have now but a little time left, wherein you can act for God and his glory here in the world, and therefore lose as little of it as possible. The review and remembrance of your past failings and neglects, which is very proper in your condition, should likewise prompt you to this: and the more sensible you are that you have in time past come short of your duty, the more zealous should you now be in the performance of it.

4. Set loose to this world, and labour to exercise and strengthen your faith in realizing views and expectations of a better world. Are
you

you heirs of glory, and just ready to enter upon the possession of it, and can it become you to be unmindful of it? How should your thoughts be taken up with it, and your souls long after it! Glorious things are spoken of the place you are hastening unto, and where you are shortly to be fixed for ever. God will speedily *show you the path of life*, and bring you to *his presence*, where there is *fulness of joy and pleasure for evermore*; where the veil shall be done away, and you shall not see as in a glass darkly, but face to face, and know as you are also known; where you shall be with the blessed Redeemer to behold his glory, and to be made like to him; where you shall be freed from all sins, all temptations, and all sorrow, and become completely glorious, and endlessly blessed.

Lift up then the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees; raise now your thoughts to the heavenly mansions that are in your Father's house, and delight your souls with the contemplation of that bliss to which you shall be suddenly advanced. Consider the promises of God, which both describe and secure that blessedness to you: and let your faith be exercised to greaten it to you. This will be a mighty ease and wonderful encouragement to you; and the more you cherish these thoughts, the more will your minds be reconciled to the expectations of death, and the less frightful will it appear to you.

And while you are persuaded of these things, and embrace the divine promises, let it appear that you look upon yourselves only as strangers
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and pilgrims in this world; that as you do not place your happiness in it, so you are not much concerned about it.

'Tis a shame to a Christian to have his heart at any time glewed to this world; but more especially when he is just about leaving it. However frequent this is with Christians, 'tis very disagreeable: it looks as though they and the world had been too good friends, that they are so unwilling to part with it. But if thou art a Christian indeed, thou must look upon the world as thine enemy: and if thou dost so account it, let it be thy endeavour to flight it, and live above it. I am sure the more lively thy apprehensions are of the other world, the less affected wilt thou be with all the occurrences of the present state.

5. Plead with God his own promises. I mean those promises which are particularly suited to your case, such as, those which engage him never to leave or forsake his people. These you may enforce by the circumstances you are in, which do more especially call for his aid, as the Psalmist thus urges his plea grounded in general upon God's promises, and the usual dispensations of his grace toward his people, Psal. lxxi. 9. *Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth.* And again, ver. 17, 18. *O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grey headed, O God, forsake me not.* But more especially should you plead the promise that is made of the fruitfulness of those of your years, Psal. xcii.

13, 14. *Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.*

6. Look back upon the mercies of God to you, and be much in blessing God for them. Such a life as yours must have been attended with a great variety of mercies, for which a large tribute of praise is due to him. In how grateful and decent a manner did Jacob, toward the end of his life, think and speak of what he had enjoyed! Gen. xlviii. 15. *The God, says he, which fed me all my life long unto this day:* and herein he is worthy of your imitation. You have received much at his hands: 'tis he who has furnished you with the comforts or necessities of life you have enjoyed, who has preserved you from dangers, delivered you from troubles, healed your diseases, given you health and strength, and brought you thus far, and has now set that crown of glory the text speaks of upon you: to him you are indebted that you are found in the way of righteousness, which makes your hoary heads to be indeed crowns of glory; as 'tis he who gave you that counsel, and inclined your hearts to follow it, and who has *led you in the paths of righteousness*, not for your desert, but *for his own name sake*: 'tis he who in consequence hereof has pardoned your sins, accepted your persons and services, bound up your broken hearts, raised you up when you were cast down; and, in a word, made all things to work together for your good here, and has given you a title to eternal life and joy hereafter. And is

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it not most reasonable, when you are thus indebted to him, that your souls, and all that is within you, should be stirred up to bless his holy name?

7. Repine not at your present circumstances, nor be fretful in your condition, though attended with various infirmities, and much weariness and pain. Your hoary heads being found in the way of righteousness are crowns of glory: what cause can you then have to repine? Bless God who has made you thus truly honourable, and wonder not that the wearing a crown should be accompanied with some troubles. The same is the case of all earthly crowns; but the troubles of yours will last but a little while.

8. Be much in the exercise of trust in Christ, and frequent in commending your souls to his care. Upon his mediation you must depend, because nothing will stand you in stead without it. He is able and ready to procure you a complete pardon of all your sins, to give you comfort in passing through death, and minister to you abundantly an entrance into his everlasting kingdom. He has *the keys of hell and death*, Rev. i. 18. is Lord of the invisible world, and of death the passage into it; he opens, and none can shut; and shuts, and none can open; nor can any *pluck out of his hand* those who are under his care. In him therefore are you to trust, and to him you are to commend your spirits. And since the infirmities of your age daily admonish you, that death cannot be far off from you; and since the thread of life is spun out so fine with you, that the smallest matter is sufficient of a sudden to
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snare it; should not this be your daily employment, to be commending your souls to his special care, intreating him to be your conductor to death, and at death to receive you to glory? Is it not a satisfaction to you, when you think of leaving yourselves upon him and his care? and when you know in whom you believe, and that he is able to keep that which you commit to his care? And have you not need therefore frequently to be renewing this your trust in him?

2. On the other hand, let me now apply myself to those who are old, or well towards it, and yet are not found in the way of righteousness. And surely 'tis high time for you now to bethink yourselves, and change your course. Have you all your days walked in an opposite and contrary path, neglecting to follow after holiness, and can you question whether you ought immediately to set about it? Give me leave to expostulate the matter with you. And,

1. Is it not plain that you turn your glory into a reproach? Your hoary heads, that should be to you as crowns of glory, and would be so if you were found in the way of righteousness, are now your shame; as they are an aggravation of all your neglect and carelessness. You who ought to have remembered your Creator from the days of your youth, and to have spent your whole lives in his service, are now become old in your forgetfulness of him, and neglect of his service. What a reproach is it to you to have spent so many years in the world, and yet to remain unacquainted with the very end and business which

you came into the world for? You have lived so long, but have been dead to God and his service while you lived. One would think that the world should long ago have convinced you of its vanity; and that your own experience should have taught you, that nothing here was fit to be the rest and portion of your souls, and should therefore have put you upon seeking after God; and yet, though you have had so much time, and so many opportunities, this is hitherto neglected; and neither the indulgence of God in sparing you, nor perhaps his severity in afflicting you, have reclaimed you to the path of righteousness: but now your life is almost done, you are to begin to live. Is not your ignorance, or neglect of God and your duty to him, of yourselves and your own hearts, and of the way of life and salvation by Christ, (is not this, I say) a shame to you at these years? *For the time that you have lived, and that in the church of God, ye ought to be teachers: and yet there is need that one teach you which are the first principles of the oracles of God; and now when your work should be just finished, the very foundation is not so much as laid.*

2. Is it a fitting thing that you should follow the path you are in to the end of your lives? Is it a fitting thing that death should find you going astray from the way of righteousness? and that you should come into the world, and go out of it, without ever entertaining any serious thoughts of the main business of life?

Is this agreeable, do you think, to the end for which God made you, and sent you into the

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the world, that you should live here so many years, and all the while do him no manner of service? 'Tis your reproach that you have squandered away the best of your time, and have nothing now but the dregs to offer to your Maker; and are they too good for his service also? Can't you now at length find in your hearts to seek him in the way of righteousness? or are you resolved that your Creator and Lord shall have no service at all from you? Methinks the time you have lost should quicken you now to use double diligence in your work; since the work itself is great, and of everlasting consequence, and you have increased the difficulty of it; while you have been hardening your hearts through a long course of sin; and you have left yourselves but very little time for the doing it.

If you cannot think of minding this affair now, when will you? You have no room to reckon upon a long stay here; and therefore unless you set about it now, it must remain for ever undone. Is it not then yet time for you to seek the Lord? Or must he be still put off farther by you?

4. Should not the mercy of God stir you up to seek him? 'Tis marvellous mercy there should be still any hope left in your case. The work is not utterly impossible, though it must be owned your course has rendered it very hard and difficult. Divine patience is still prolonged, and the offer of the Gospel is renewed; you have yet time to seek God in and through his Christ, and to pray for his Spirit to enlighten

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your minds, soften your hearts, and renew your souls: *With God all things are possible.* Awake then out of your security, and shake off your sloth; and call upon God as for your lives; *break off your sins by repentance,* and from a conviction of your guilt, and a sense of your danger; *flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you;* and while you have yet time, and a merciful Redeemer is intreating you, hearken to his call, and give up yourselves to his conduct.

5. Should you not be moved by what is like to be the terrible issue and consequence of your neglect and carelessness? If you will not be found now in the way of righteousness, you must not expect to be settled in the mansions of the righteous; you cannot then reasonably expect that you should *die the death of the righteous;* or that your *latter end should be like his;* you must then assuredly perish in your iniquity, and your blood will be upon your own heads. God has prepared vengeance for such, and he will render to them a due recompence in the other world. And though your lives should be ever so far prolonged, yet are you accursed; *for the sinner being an hundred years old, shall be accursed,* Isa. lxxv. 20. God is *angry with you every day;* and though you may slight that now, yet hereafter he will make you feel the terribleness of his wrath.

Be not then strangers to your own advantage; but as you have such plain signs of your approaching change, lay them to heart. God speaks of Ephraim as grossly stupid, because he

S E R M O N XIII.

The Folly and Guilt of Intemperance.

By the Rev. Mr. HOLLAND.

LUKE xxi. 34. former part.

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness. —

SO many and great, and at the same time, so very evident are the evils arising from luxury and Intemperance, that to be guilty of them is a certain sign of deplorable folly. Indeed, if any satisfaction was to be found in a profligate life, which a sober man cannot so perfectly taste, there might be some ground for dispute and comparison; but not one single enjoyment is obtained by excess, to ballance the miseries, which always attend it. Many vices can give a plausible account of themselves, and offer something in their own vindication. The miser has wealth for his end, which may be

be useful in many respects to himself and others: the ambitious aim at power and glory. These pursue some appearances of good, which, if they are false, are specious however: but what kind of advantage a man can hope to gain by habitual Intemperance, it is not easy to conceive.

It is certain at least, he is in no very promising way to improve his outward circumstances; for commonly wealth is the fruit of industry; but, that Intemperance is the ruin of industry, we are too well instructed by daily observation. We find, it seldom leaves a man either time, or capacity, or inclination for the diligent prosecution of any employment. And while it prevents him from gaining more, it also dissipates what he already possesseth, at once draining his fortune, and cutting off the streams, which ought to supply it. Riot and luxury are expensive vices, able to devour the largest estates and consume the revenue of whole towns and provinces. They are seldom content with the dull repetition of former excesses, but delight to be inventing new and more costly methods of indulgence. Luxury therefore is never at a stand; it breaks through all restraints, and, having once leaped the bounds of nature and reason, disdains to be confined within the compass of men's circumstances, however extensive. It also creates a contempt of good œconomy, and makes men careless and imprudent in the conduct of their affairs. It therefore leads to poverty,

and has often ruined the most considerable fortunes.

And poverty is then by far the most intolerable, when it has been occasioned by debauchery and excess. The man, that has always used himself to a temperate life, may be contented and chearful in narrow circumstances: he has moderate appetites and few wants, which are easily supplied at a small expence. But they, who are accustomed to high living, have created to themselves a multitude of wants, and cannot descend, without extreme reluctance, to that cheap and frugal diet, which poverty prescribes. Their palates, being made tender with delicacies, cannot bear the touch of ordinary fare. Hence, when the diminution of their fortunes compel them to retrench the luxury of their tables, they repine at their condition, are mortified with the remembrance of past pleasures, and long in vain to repeat them.

There lives not upon earth a more pitiful creature than a reduced bebauchee. Want, impotent desires, infamy and guilt conspire to make him wretched and contemptible. His fortune is wasted; and to what end? To gratify his unnatural and beastly appetites. And whither is it gone? Why, truly it is become a prey to the vilest of mankind; to the corrupters of youth; the worst plagues of society; the procurers of mean pleasures; the pimps and pandars to luxury. For the benefit of such deserving persons, he has impoverished himself, neglected his relations and friends,
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and abused those, whom nature or their own imprudence had committed to his care.

In the mean time he has recourse to base methods, in order to retrieve his fortune, and continue his debauched pleasures. His unnatural appetites, whose commands he dares not dispute, order him to furnish exorbitant supplies; which if he cannot obtain by lawful methods, he is prepared for the most dishonourable practices. His occasions are pressing, and at any rate ways and means must be invented to procure what may administer to his insatiable lusts. Before he sacrificed fortune to pleasure, and now he prostitutes honour to fortune. If in a high station, he becomes a pliant tool to any party, which makes him the largest offers; abandons integrity; eagerly courts the wages of corruption; and would esteem himself happy, if he could sell his country and conscience together for a bribe or a pension. If of lower rank, he either sinks into a slavish dependance on his superiors, courting their favour, and haunting their tables; or engages in the commission of some desperate villainy, to support his extravagance.

It is plain, that in the case of most men, a course of Intemperance must unavoidably end in absolute ruin. But what shall we say to the profligate, who has received the curse of heaven in a large fortune? Should we mention to him the danger of being reduced, he would perhaps reply: "You may preach these things to poor scoundrels, whose fortunes will not bear the expence of good living. It

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“ may concern them to listen to your cautions. As for me, I am under no such obligations to a sober life. I can take my full swing, in what you call, dissolute pleasures, without any danger of lessening my income.” —And can you indeed find no better way to dispose of your superfluities than in feeding your ravenous appetites? have you no family to provide for? no friends, that would be obliged by your bounty? does no good man want relief? are there no poor in the world? no indigent orphans to be educated? Why don’t you encourage useful undertakings, and deal out something to your fellow creatures around you? Reason also permits, nay it commands you to count upon ill fortune, and make some provision against possible accidents. Are you only of all men secure against adversity, that you thus condemn the maxims of prudence, and devour your whole income, as fast as you receive it? are you certain the time will never come, when your friends will pity you, your enemies despise you, and you yourself curse this mad and prodigal waste? which, do you think, may expect the turns of fortune with more cheerfulness, and bear them with greater ease? you, who have accustomed your mind and body to rich and delicate living; or he, who, being content with a little, and provident for the future, has wisely prepared both himself and his circumstances for the worst that can happen? Besides, you may do well to consider the insatiable greediness of intemperance and luxury; how apt they are to rise
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in their demands; and what endless expence they will oblige you to furnish. Your substance must be great indeed, or I could mention more than one, who, though heretofore richer than you, have yet reduced themselves by excess to beggary and want.

Should it now be asked; where is the harm, if we love our money less than our pleasure? I answer; the harm lies, not so much in preferring the one to the other, as in loving either of them too well, and pursuing them too eagerly. Luxury and riot are not worth having, if we might have them without any expence; for they must be dearly paid for in other enjoyments of much greater value. The body, it is plain, must be a considerable sufferer in its comeliness, activity, ease and health. Excess, we see, deflowers the countenance, and usually extinguishes all the symptoms of sense, ingenuity, and modesty. It is also apt to render the body weak and languid, or unwieldy and gross; and in both cases unfit for action.

Nor will it bear dispute, which has the advantage in point of ease and tranquillity, the temperate man or the intemperate. The gratifications of the latter are preceded by violent and feverish desires; the former can chearfully dispense with necessary forbearance. Moderate meals and simple food sit easy on the stomach, digest without difficulty, and are succeeded by pleasant thoughts and lively conceptions. But high and various diet raiseth tumults within; and gross surfeiting oppresseth
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the body, and along with it weighs down also its divine companion.

They, who have tried it, may easily recollect in what an uncomfortable condition a debauch leaves them; how restless they are, and how utterly incapable of any enjoyment; with what nauseating and distaste they then reflect upon those flowing bowls, over which they had just been singing praises to Intemperance, and condemning a sober life, as dull and miserable. It may be of service to them, if they call to mind their want of appetite, and of relish for any thing; the distempered state both of mind and body; and the grievous pains and convulsions, which, it is supposed, they feel upon such occasions: all which are aggravated by the stings of remorse, while the mind frets under its misery, and chides its own folly in procuring it. Was the pleasure of a debauch as valuable in itself, as it is despicable, whoever should take it, knowing it must be followed by such a severe and speedy penance, would have no wrong done him if he was reputed a madman.

Yet these immediate disorders are only a small part of the reckoning; for Intemperance does a lasting prejudice to health, and often breaks the constitution. It fills the body with noxious humours, and produceth distempers, for which death is the only cure. It has been said,

*The first physicians by debauch were made,
Excess began, and sloth maintains the trade.*

But,

But, I suppose, the physicians are sensible, that excess not only began, but, as well as sloth, contributes not a little to maintain their profession. Diseases commonly excite compassion; but, when they proceed from Intemperance, they expose to infamy, and few are so good-natured, as not to make them the subjects of ridicule and scorn.

But you trust in the vigour of your constitution: it has past perhaps through some trials without any sensible damage, and will, you doubt not, be able to stand the repeated shocks of future debaucheries. Oh, that heaven had blest you with a weaker frame, which would have warned you more faithfully of the injuries it suffered. It is probable, the fatal poison is now creeping through your veins, though you don't perceive it, and has already corrupted the principles of life. Intemperance will either violently cut you off in the midst of your days, or, if it suffers you to grow old, it will then exact a grievous penance for the follies of youth. Declining age has enough to bear in its own infirmities; why then do you seek to oppress it with additional burthens? It looks for gentle treatment, and would be daily indulged more and more; but what indulgence have you in reserve for it, while you enjoy, in the vigour of your life, that luxury, to which nothing can be added?

Wherefore do you knowingly rush upon all these calamities? why will you thus abuse your body, and waste your fortune? What end or advantage do you propose to yourself,

that can make you amends for the miseries of Intemperance? One may easily conjecture, what you would reply.—'Tis pleasure you pursue; pleasure, in your opinion, the best, the sovereign good of mortals. To this you sacrifice your fortune: for where is the value of wealth, if unemployed? And how can wealth, say you, be laid out better, than in procuring pleasure? To obtain this, you readily abandon all other enjoyments. In exchange for this, to part with health, ease and merit, you think a prudent bargain. And no wonder, when, for its sake, you can even consent to abate somewhat in the article of life; and esteem a shorter duration, filled up with debauched pleasures, preferable to a longer, on the hard conditions of sobriety and temperance.

Now here it may perhaps be expected, that I should inveigh against pleasure, and assert it to be of little moment to the happiness of life: a point by no means difficult to be maintained, but needless at present, since it is easy to convict the debauchee of Folly upon his own principles. Let us then suppose, what many seem to believe, that pleasure is the supreme good of human life; that other enjoyments are only valuable, as they are subservient to it; and that any, or all of them ought to be abandoned, whenever they come in competition with it. I say, if we allow this at present, it will be no hard matter to shew, that by Intemperance you widely miss your aim, and lose the best part of this very pleasure, which

which stands so high in your estimation. For what is a debauch? but a wild tumult of sensations and passions, which at the time is attended with little enjoyment, issues in pain, and prevents you from relishing future indulgences.

I believe no man ever said more in praise of pleasure than Epicurus: and yet perhaps no man ever enjoined more earnestly, or observed more constantly the severest laws of sobriety. He asserts indeed, that sensual pleasure is our supreme good. In this doubtless he is mistaken; for certainly we are formed for something nobler than meer animal enjoyments. But if he erred about the end, he judged better of the means proper to attain the end he proposed. He had more sense than to recommend luxury and excess, as the best ways to enjoy pleasure in the greatest perfection. He rejects them as its implacable enemies, disowns the intemperate for his disciples, and condemns them as the veriest fools in nature. This diligent studier and zealous patron of pleasure thought it derived its chief heightening from moderate use; and boasted, that, while he lived upon the produce of his ordinary garden, he could equal the gods themselves in happiness. The precepts of his philosophy, and the maxims, by which he governed his life, would be as ill relished by a modern debauchee, as the gravest sermon, and as little regarded.

Though if Pleasure could speak herself, and was inclined to shew us the way to obtain her,

she would warn us above all things to avoid Intemperance and high-living. She favours the plain modest solicitor; but flies equally from the drunkard and glutton, who press upon her with rude eagerness, and from the refined sensualist, who hath recourse to a too artificial and studied elegance. We may be convinced of this, if we turn our attention from the suggestions of a wanton fancy, and listen to the following plain dictates of homely truth.

That you may enjoy pleasure in the best manner, the main thing, you are to seek for, is a good appetite. Bread and water, recommended by hunger and thirst, will be attended with far more grateful sensations, than the most curious meats and the richest wines, if an appetite be wanting. And the means, to obtain a sound appetite, are labour and abstinence. It is necessary then, you abandon sloth, and patiently wait the demands of nature. If you accustom yourself to a luxurious diet, your taste will soon be corrupted, you will relish neither common nor uncommon food, and nothing will any longer be thoroughly agreeable. High-living is therefore an enemy to pleasure. When nature calleth, if you have not vitiated your taste by former luxury, it were a needless solicitude, to search out rare and costly delicacies. The most simple and common of nature's productions will afford you an equally grateful and sincere enjoyment: for, vanity apart, how comes that, which costeth more, to be better, merely upon this account, than

than that, which is purchased for less? or does indeed the scarcity of any thing render its taste the more exquisite and pleasing? As you must wait, till nature calleth, so you must leave off as soon as she is satisfied: if you proceed further, all beyond is languid or cloying; if not immediately attended, it will soon be followed by disgust; besides it injures both ease and health, along with which pleasure also will vanish. — These rules, severe as some persons may think them, we must observe, if we would gratify our senses in the most exquisite manner. From whence it is evident, that the active and sober enjoy the most, and lazy debauchees the least pleasure of any men upon earth; though the latter professedly make it the end of their pursuits, and resign for its sake all other enjoyments.

Fortune, health, ease, pleasure, each of them suffer by luxury and Intemperance. It is also well enough known, how a man's credit in the world is affected by a dissolute course of life: how he stains his character, forfeits the confidence of mankind, and is shunned by considerate persons, as a corrupter of society and good manners. Heaven be praised, we are not yet arrived to such a pass, as generally to approve a debauched character. We still allow it, though perhaps not its due share, yet some degree of infamy and reproach; and if there are those, who don't despise it, one would not methinks be very ambitious of their esteem. With whatever indulgence the debauched herd may sometimes be treated, or
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how highly soever they may see good to think of themselves, it is certain, the whole creation doth not afford a greater monster than a drunken man; nor doth any character in human life appear more despicable and mean to all wise and good men, than that of a drunkard. This is not only infamous in common with other vices, but hath also certain circumstances peculiar to itself, which tend to lessen a man in the eyes of the world. It enlarges every flaw in the mind, and lays open his most secret failings. A man, that is sober, may conceal his own defects, out of regard to the judgment of others concerning him; and though he is not upon this account a better man, he makes however a more decent appearance. But wine prompts him to throw by his veil, and to expose, with equal impudence and folly, the latent blemishes of his soul in their utmost deformity. Nor doth it only reveal his hidden faults, and display them in the most odious colours; but often produceth faults, to which he is not naturally subject. It changeth him into a different person, and infuseth evil qualities into the mind, which she is a stranger to in her sober moments. Hence he is frequently thought to be worse than he is, and sinks, if possible, even lower than he deserves in the opinion of mankind.

Nor doth any other vice tend to render men equally ridiculous. A drunken man affords diversion to such as have not the sense to pity him; except indeed to his relations and friends; for to them, alas! it is but a sorry entertainment.

tainment to see him abuse and shame himself. But to his enemies, or to indifferent persons, he offers himself to be derided, and condescends to make sport for children, and for his own servants. He puts off the man, and becomes again a child, loseth all command of mind and body, and falls into the wildest extravagancies of folly and passion; saying and doing the most ridiculous things; strutting with pride, elevated with frantic joy, or blustering with rage, when so impotent that a child would master him. But enough of this. To me it is by no means an agreeable, I wish it was not a necessary work, to rake thus into the dregs of vice, and describe these low and sordid characters. Where the originals are so mean, the pictures can scarce be otherwise than offensive.

There is scarce any thing so bad, as not to be capable of serving to some good purpose: the truth of which maxim you will be less apt to suspect, when you find it confirmed in the unpromising instance of a drunken man. Such an one exhibits to young persons a spectacle, that may improve their minds, and strengthen them against this vice, more than all the precepts and instructions in the world. Hence it was the practice, we are told, in a certain nation, famous for the wisdom of its laws and customs, to make a slave drunk, and expose him in that condition, as a spectacle to their children. They thought, it seems, that to let their children observe, into what beastly and contemptible creatures Intemperance converts

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men, was a likely way to create in them a settled hatred of debauchery and excess. Though we have no slaves to abuse for this purpose, we cannot justly complain, that our youth are in want of these edifying spectacles. Would to God they made a right improvement of them; and that every man, who derides or pities a drunkard, was seriously concerned never to become such an object himself.

S E R M O N XIII.

The Folly and Guilt of Intemperance.

By the Rev. Mr. HOLLAND.

LUKE xxi. 34. former part.

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness. —

SOME, it seems, look upon it as an extravagant assertion, that virtue is worthy of our choice for its own sake, and without any prospect of foreign rewards. But whatever is determined concerning the other branches of virtue, Temperance certainly can need no recommendation to any wise man, besides its own worth, and the advantage of being saved from the numerous evils occasioned by excess. It is evident, upon the slightest reflection, and has been illustrated in a former discourse, that Intemperance hath no very desirable effects upon the body and fortune; on the other hand,

that by means of it the latter is made a prey to the most worthless part of mankind, and the former greatly injured in its health, ease, and vigour. It hath also been shewn, that excess is the corruption of pleasure, and loseth the best part of those very enjoyments, which it professedly aims at: and lastly, that it exposeth men to infamy and shame. Now if these were all the miseries it produced, a prudent man would be so far from wanting a reward to be sober, that no small rewards would tempt him to be otherwise.

But we proceed now further to observe, that Intemperance disqualifies a man for the offices of life, and makes him useless and despicable in all relations. For first, if we consider him as part of a family; what place can we assign him in it, which he may fill up usefully and well? Is he likely to prove a good husband to his wife, or a good father to his children? Will he not be apt to neglect their welfare, to manage their common concerns imprudently, to prefer his companions in debauch before the most deserving relations, and to waste, in gratifying his own appetites, what he ought to have employed for the benefit of those, whom God and nature have committed to his care? These things, alas! are too fully attested by the just complaints of many a miserable family.

Let us then see, how he will suit an inferior rank, and consider him in the capacity of a son, or a servant. Can any man desire, will the veriest profligate upon earth be well pleased,
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that his children should be intemperate? Would they, upon this account, be less burdensome and more serviceable to their parents? Would they assist them better, when labouring under the infirmities of age, than if they were sober and temperate? You may consult those parents, who are so unfortunate as to have them; and unless they are utterly void both of sense and virtue, you will easily perceive what an insupportable grief and torment it is to them, that their children are debauched. Nor should we imagine him possessed of too much prudence, who should commit the management of his affairs, either within or without doors, to the care of an intemperate person. If you had occasion for a steward or a servant, you would hardly accept of such an one, though you was to give him nothing for his pains. Surely then it concerns you not to be intemperate yourself, since you would esteem an intemperate man unworthy to serve you in the lowest offices.

And how should you like him for a fellow-guest or a fellow-traveller? Would the temperate man, as such, be a worse choice? or should you indeed be as well pleased with him, who takes more delight in a good table than in the company of his friends, and whose attention upon all occasions, is employed in providing only for himself, and his own exquisite sensations?

Nor do I suppose, you would long hesitate, which to chuse for a friend or near relation; at least, if they were equal in other re-

spects, the temperate man or the intemperate. From the latter you would have little reason to expect, that he should prefer you to his pleasures, for the sake of which he abandons his own ease, health, and fortune. And though we might suppose it possible for a debauchee to love his friends better than his pleasure, he will not however be able to assist them, either with his fortune, or personal service, so well as the man of sober life. Both his body and mind are worse qualified for useful offices; and his fortune runs out so fast through the channels of luxury, that little can be spared to answer the demands of generosity and friendship.

If you were near the close of life, which of these would you prefer for an executor, or a trustee, or a guardian to your children? Could you entrust their education with a dissolute rake, and rest satisfied, that their innocence and fortune would be equally secure in his hands, as if committed to one of an opposite character? A sober man, 'tis true, may be a villain; but his sobriety has no tendency to make him one; whereas a profligate course leads men directly into such strong temptations to violate justice and faith, as may well discourage us from placing so great a confidence in their honesty.

It is the same, we shall find, with respect to public trusts, and the more important offices of civil life. Which, do you imagine, is likely to act the honestest part as a magistrate or a senator? Might we not more reasonably depend upon the man of sober life and tem-

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perate desires? or may he indeed be as safely relied on, who by an extravagant luxury multiplies his wants in the same proportion, that he impairs his fortune? A gentleman, having once a bribe offered him, pointed to his table, which was but indifferently furnished, and replied, that, content as he was, to live in that frugal manner, he had no occasion for any such offers. Now I don't say, it is impossible, such a man should be corrupted; but his integrity is doubtless in less danger on account of his moderation.

Once more; if we were engaged in war, and were to chuse officers and soldiers to defend us, should we prefer those, who are enervated by luxury, and slaves to their pleasures? From an army composed of such persons, or commanded by a general of such a character, how could we hope for safety to ourselves, or victory over our enemies?

In short, if we run over all the employments and offices of life, we still find, that Intemperance is but an ill qualification for any of them, and renders a man less useful and valuable in society, let the rank and station he holds in it, be what they will.

A debauchee therefore, whatever merit he may think proper to assume to himself, really deserves very ill from his friends, and from mankind in general: as will appear more fully, if we consider, that Intemperance is often the cause of many other vices, which either immediately attend it, or follow at a distance.

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Among such as commonly attend it, we may reckon profaneness, obscenity, impudence, and a neglect of all the rules of decency and good manners. Add to these, a wild licence of speech, folly in divulging its own, and baseness in betraying the secrets of its friend. Drunkenness is a voluntary frenzy; for wherein does he, that is drunk, differ from a madman? except in this indeed, that his madness perhaps does not last so long. Was he to continue for a year in that condition, you would not scruple to pronounce him unfit to go loose, and without a guardian. His frenzy therefore is not less in degree, only shorter in duration.

Wine makes fools of all men, but it produceth different kinds of folly, according to the difference of their tempers. The good-natured man it turns into an idiot, in others it inflames the most mischievous passions. It heightens pride into insupportable arrogance, jealousy into distraction, anger into fury. The best we can expect from one in these circumstances are petulant humours and abusive treatment, which move our resentment, but don't excite our horror: and if nothing more tragical happens, it is fortunate for those about him, as well as for the unhappy wretch himself. But what think you of murdering a friend, or a neighbour? You may startle at the thought, but whenever you get drunk, you threaten the act. "As if we are accountable," you may say, "for what we do in our liquor." Yes, most certainly you are accountable at the bar of God and reason, not only for the wicked-

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ness you do, but also for that, which you do not perpetrate. You voluntarily put yourself into a condition, in which you cannot answer for it, that you will not execute the most horrid of all crimes; and therefore you are in some measure guilty, though heaven should restrain you from actually committing them.

A cruel and rough disposition is a common effect of habitual Intemperance. The drunkard, even in his sober intervals, enjoys but little of genuine serenity and good humour. His spirit, after having suffered such violent agitations, doth not suddenly recover its calm; but, continuing to be chafed and fretted with its own miseries, vents itself in ill-nature to others, in rancour and spleen towards those, who have a right to his tenderest regards. Repeated debauches exasperate his temper, sour his affections, and render habitual those savage passions that are produced by excess. And as Intemperance corrupts the heart, so it has the most fatal influence on the understanding. It insensibly blunts the apprehension, weakens the judgment, and impairs the memory; and thus by degrees reduces the mind into a state of deplorable sottishness and stupidity.

Excess therefore makes way for all manner of depravity, introducing into the minds of men the most fatal disorders, and into their lives a long train of detestable vices.

Besides what we have already mentioned, if we trace out its remoter consequences, we shall find them often no less pernicious and execrable than its more immediate effects. Let us imagine

gine a young person of high spirit setting out in the world with a moderate fortune. Let him make haste to enjoy life, as some express it; that is, let him give himself up to the greedy pursuit of dissolute pleasures, and let us observe, whither they will lead him. For a time perhaps, while he is not as yet so thoroughly engaged, his income may answer his expences: but luxury is apt to rise in its demands. His appetites daily become more insatiable and importunate, his debauches more frequent and more expensive. Industry is despised, thought banished, œconomy neglected; excess being at work the while in scattering what his ancestors had collected and saved for the unworthy wretch. His income begins to fall short; he breaks into his patrimony to make good the defect. Debts are contracted, estates mortgaged, and sold, one after another; poverty steals upon him as a traveller, and at last want invades him as an armed man. In the mean time his lusts, finding themselves abridged of their wonted gratifications, are enraged at the disappointment, and command the slave, under severe penalties, to furnish out their accustomed supplies. Now whence can he procure them? he has nothing left, and cannot gain what will satisfy his appetites by any lawful employment. Luxury and riot, having stripped him of his wealth, turn him out, a ravenous beast, into human society. He preys upon his parents and friends, and after he has devoured them, or wearied them out in maintaining his de-

debauches, he seizeth upon whatever come in his way. He submits to any meanness, by which he may hope to pacify his lusts; and if lesser crimes do not succeed, his last resource is rapine or theft.

Such is the life; observe now the ordinary natural death of a profligate. He kills himself in despair, dies in a jail, or falls by the hand of publick justice. The best chance, he has, to escape some such catastrophe, is, that Intemperance may possibly put an end to his life, before it has compleated the ruin of his fortune.

Now from whence, but from a vehement love of voluptuousness, doth all this guilt and wretchedness originally spring? And shall it then pass for an argument of good nature and humanity, when men harangue upon the innocence, and even launch forth in the praise, of sensual pleasures? as if mankind were not enough sensible of their worth, but had learned to undervalue them from the instructions of envious divines and rigid philosophers. Perhaps indeed, when they commend pleasures, they confine themselves to that, which is enjoyed with sobriety and moderation. However at best they exhort us to pursue a low and ignoble end, and apply themselves to cherish an affection, which is evidently the root of all licentiousness. Would it not, think you, be much the safer way, never to encourage an high relish of animal pleasures; than first to inflame it with encomiums, and then leave it to be retained within bounds by prudential considerations.

siderations? Are these the sentiments which our youth want to have instilled into them? these the principles, that must lead them into the paths of honour and probity? Such discourses are as remote from good sense, as our manners are from purity and virtue: for it will be found, that the most implacable and successful enemies to the integrity and happiness of men are those pleasures, which depend upon the body. Riot, and even that luxury, which boasteth of its elegance, have overflowed human life with a deluge of vices, which not only injure particular persons, and reduce private families into extreme distress, but often involve whole societies in ruin. Hence those most perfect of all crimes, treason and corruption, by which laws and government are subverted, and nations rendered miserable. For when once, by luxury and high-living, men have created to themselves numberless wants, which no private fortune is able to supply, they will hire themselves out upon any terms to the highest bidder: such persons therefore are prepared to embrace the first opportunity of betraying their country for a valuable consideration, to a foreign enemy or a domestick tyrant. Of what are the troops of rebellion principally composed? but of men, whose prodigality has reduced them to want. And who are the leaders of these troops? are they not commonly persons in like circumstances, who seek to overturn the state, that out of its ruins they may seize upon something, wherewith to repair their shattered fortunes? Such was Catiline

line of old; such was Kilmarnock in our own age; and such were many of the desperate crews, that joined in assisting their execrable attempts.

We see then the various Guilt and dismal effects of Intemperance; how it makes men ill to themselves, and ill with respect to their friends and human society. And from much less than what has been said, it were easy to conclude; that luxury and debauch are contrary to the true enjoyment of life, and lead to misery in this world.

As to a future state; the Scriptures, in which almighty God has revealed his unchangeable purpose, expressly declare, that *drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God*. In vain therefore will be your faith, your prayers, and religious observances; in vain do you assume the garb of sanctity, and regularly attend on divine institutions; if by these things you propose to atone for your debaucheries. Unless to piety and devotion, you add temperance and purity of heart and life, you have no reason to hope for happiness at last: and whoever teaches you, by any means, to reconcile the expectation of heaven to a dissolute life, deceives you in your most grand and important concern.

And here, I must not omit the arguments used by our Saviour, to enforce the caution contained in the text. *Take heed, says he, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and so that day, the awful day of judgment, come upon you unawares.* A consideration, which one would think,

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think, might awaken the most stupid sinner. Do we not observe, that men frequently die in fits of Intemperance? and have you any assurance, that, after your next debauch, you will not find yourself in another world, when you come to your senses? Take heed therefore to yourself; for certainly it is dreadful beyond expression, to rush into eternity, and appear before the pure and holy God, in order to receive your decisive sentence, with a soul, that has just been drenched in sensuality, and is yet reeking with the pollutions of a debauch.

“But the sovereign power is merciful, and therefore, you trust, he will not punish you for enjoying your pleasures.” Your principle here is certain, but the inference, you draw from it, false and deceitful. God is merciful; but in that sense merciful, as to be at the same time just and pure. God is merciful; but he has none of that weak clemency and easiness of nature, which would suffer men to escape with impunity, while they persist in violating his laws. What other meaning you may have, when you say, that God is merciful, is best known to yourself. Only this I know, that the judge of all the earth is perfectly good. “Yes, you will say, and from thence ariseth all my confidence.” But what if it should appear, that this very goodness, on which you build your hope, will itself incline him to punish you, and ought more than any thing to make you tremble? For, if he is perfectly good, he will certainly dispose of you hereafter, as shall be for the best: now it is best in every govern-

government, both divine and human, that all sorts of iniquity should be punished, and Intemperance among the rest. As sure then as God is good, nay for that very reason, because he is good, whoever leads an impure and dissolute life, and dies unreformed, shall hereafter feel the scourge of his justice.

But surely, you hope, God will not punish you merely for enjoying your pleasures. That is to say; though you have debased the nature he has given you, neglected the offices of virtue, and been guilty of many foul disorders, by which you have injured human society, as well as your own family and friends; yet, forasmuch as you aimed at nothing in all this, besides the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, God, you are persuaded, will exempt you from punishment. Thus one man steals, another commits adultery, that they may enjoy their pleasure. Now let the thief and the adulterer plead before a human court; that they ought not to be punished for their respective crimes, because they committed them only for the sake of their own pleasure: what, I beseech you, would you think of the judge, who upon such a plea should acquit the offender? would you not be ready to cry out with astonishment, "Good God, what a judge!" And yet you risk your salvation upon it, that the sovereign judge, whose name you invoke, will act in the same manner towards you, when you shall appear before him in judgment.

After all, perhaps, you flatter yourself, you may get to heaven at last without renouncing
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your vices. Now, I wonder, what notion you have formed concerning heaven. If you conceive of it, as a place where any sort of spirits may be happy, you are much mistaken; for we may assert, without being justly chargeable with presumption, that there can be no such place in the universe. Or if you can possibly imagine, that the happiness of heaven ariseth from sensual pleasures, you are still as widely mistaken; for the felicity of the blessed above is of a much nobler and more exalted nature, and such as can be relished only by pure and good minds. It consisteth partly in the enjoyments of reason, and in the exercise of friendship and devotion. And though we cannot fully describe, what it is; yet what it is not, we know more distinctly. We know, for instance, that those mean gratifications, for which alone the debauchee has any relish, constitute no part of this sublime happiness. Do not therefore delude yourself with vain hopes. God will assuredly admit none into heaven, but such as have cultivated a relish for the sacred joys and noble employments of that blissful state. As for him, who is capable of no happiness, but that which is derived through the channels of sense, he must of course be miserable, wherever he is, as soon as death shall have stripped him of this body, and along with it of all its senses.

From the whole then, it is evident, that the fruit of Intemperance is misery, both here and hereafter.

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In what remains, let me desire the attention, first of those who have contracted habits of drunkenness; and secondly, of young persons, who have hitherto escaped this fatal vice. Though indeed, as to the former, there is little reason to expect, that any advice can be serviceable to them, since they daily proceed in direct opposition to what, they cannot but know, is their true interest. Any child or fool might easily shew them, that they lead an infamous and miserable life, and at times they are not backward to acknowledge as much; and yet they will not alter it. To what purpose then is it to reason with them? or by what arguments may one hope to reclaim those, who knowingly rush upon their own destruction? The case of these unhappy men is plainly this: though they often make pretensions to liberty, and talk much of living freely, they are the poorest and most abject slaves in nature; for they are bound so fast in the fetters of lust, that they can no longer follow what in their own opinion is best for themselves, and are incapable of executing one manly resolve to regain their freedom.

Shall we then give them up as incurable? This goes hard with humanity; since, while there is life, some hope still remains, though perhaps but little. Sure I am, if arguments can do any good, they offer themselves in plenty; arguments, plain as day, and important, as all that is to be desired in this world, and prayed for in the next. Your mind suffers, your understanding is impaired, your heart cor-

rupted, and your character stained by Intemperance. Fortune, health, and even pleasure, your favourite passion, plead earnestly against it. And what satisfaction would it give your real friends and all good men, to see you change your course of life? Your family mourns your excess, and society justly complains, it is injured. Lastly, God commands, and eternity warns you to amend and reform.

“But you cannot abstain.” For, it seems, this pretence is sometimes alledged by men as well as children, when they have no inclination to perform their duty; and the same answer may serve for both, namely, that, if they will, they can. Or is it really true, that your feet carry you against your own consent into company and places, where debauchery reigns? or suppose you have the wine at your lips, will not your hands take it away, whenever you please? What if you were assured, at that very instant, that the liquor was poisoned, as indeed to you it always is, would you not convince us, you had power to abstain at your good pleasure? Alas! these are mere frivolous excuses; for God knows, and you know well enough, that nothing is faulty, besides your own will.

It is true indeed, you cannot reform without some difficulty; but then you cannot persist without infinitely greater. If a tooth does but ache, you readily consent to endure some pain, that your grievance may be removed; and will you bear nothing in order to be cured, when your mind labours under a most malignant and dangerous distemper? The pains of
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reformation will soon be over, and when once it is accomplished, the relief and satisfaction, you will find within yourself, will exceed whatever you can possibly imagine; whereas, if you proceed in the way, in which you are now engaged, your guilt and wretchedness will be continually encreasing, and will issue at last in remediless misery. The longer you delay the work of repentance, the more difficult you will find it to reform. Your sensual inclinations will become stronger upon every new indulgence, and you will soon have acquired such an habit of trifling, as will engage you to trifle on, as long as you live. In short; you will act the fool in the fable, who, being interrupted in his journey by a river, stayed waiting, till all the water should be run by. You will even be worse than him in this respect; for, the river would continue much the same; or, if it rose, it would fall again; but the difficulties which hinder you from proceeding, will continually rise and swell, so as to become, in length of time, barely surmountable. If then you cannot find resolution to go through them now, when they are less, how can you promise yourself you shall, when they are greater?

May I not safely venture to rest this point upon your own experience? Have you not heretofore determined, you would enter upon a sober life at some season, which is now past? and when the appointed time came, did not this resolution vanish, like the morning cloud or the early dew? You would follow your

pleasures but a few years, and then,—What then? Why then you wanted to follow them a few years longer. And the same, I doubt, will be the issue of the good purposes you now form, if you refer them to any season beyond the present. Let the remembrance of past failures convince you of the vanity of distant resolutions, and excite you from henceforth to act with more vigour. Seize the passing moment, which alone is yours, for it is never too soon to be wise and happy. Human life is short and precarious; make haste therefore to enjoy it; but you cannot enjoy it, unless you become sober and temperate. Thus you will improve the present in the best manner; as to the future, what share of it shall fall in this world or the next, is known to God only; but fall where it will, if you would provide wisely against it, you must renounce your vices. Be these your morning thoughts, your evening meditations. Impress them strongly upon your mind, and retain them habitually there, that they may be always in readiness to support your resolution, when temptations assault you. But if after all, you will still retain your old habits, it is the kindest wish, your friends can form upon your account, that God would mercifully visit you with some severe affliction, which may awaken you to repentance; when other means have proved ineffectual, and thus prevent your final ruin.

It remains lastly, that I address myself to young persons, who have hitherto escaped the snares of Intemperance. Nor will I dissemble it,

it, that my principal view in this discourse was to warn them against the scandalous debauchery of the age. Inveterate sinners of this kind are hardly to be reclaimed; nor is it often found, I believe, that any advice, either in publick, or private, has much effect upon them. The best way therefore, that we can turn our endeavours, is in exerting ourselves to prevent those disorders, which we cannot cure. And, if all we can say, should prove instrumental in saving one youth from debauchery, or confirming him in the love of sobriety and temperance, it will have done no inconsiderable service.

When we were considering the guilt and misery, that proceed from excess, it is possible, some persons might be a little disturbed, if by chance their own case was imperfectly described. But to you, who have thus far preserved your innocence, a review of the evils, you have thereby escaped, would perhaps afford no small satisfaction. And well it might: for how much fairer do you stand for happiness of every kind than any of those, who have given themselves up to intemperate courses? Indulge yourselves in this honest satisfaction, and begin to enjoy the fruit of your virtue. Compare the happiness, which attends your sober conduct, with the dismal effects of debauchery in some of your acquaintance, and learn wisdom by observing their follies. Consider especially, how contemptible and ridiculous Intemperance makes them; what a beastly and infamous life they lead; what pains they

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feel of body and mind; how they are pitied by their friends, and despised by their enemies; what little merit they are conscious of towards human society; how ill they are qualified for the enjoyments of sense and reason; and for the laudable offices and employments of life; and, to compleat all, how difficult they find it, to recover themselves from this deplorable condition. Would you consent to change circumstances with one of these unfortunate creatures? I persuade myself you would not upon any terms.

Let me therefore advise you, to be upon your guard against their vices. Nor ought you to be offended, that I say, you should be upon your guard; for many a promising youth has been ruined through a confidence of his own security. It is the condition of mortality always to be exposed to temptations, and whoever thinks himself absolutely safe, threatens to be a sinner. If you boldly venture to the utmost limits of temperance; if you regard place, time and company, as things indifferent; if you begin to dally with vice, and walk heedless among its snares, your wise friends will tremble with the apprehension, that you will one day become an abandoned profligate. You have heard, perhaps, that a little extravagance is allowable in youth, and that a single debauch is a small matter: but certainly a drunken habit is no small matter, and all habits are formed by degrees. After the first offence, the same excuse will serve for a second, and be more easily admitted; for the restraints both
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of honour and conscience will be weakened. You should therefore be careful to preserve inviolate the chastity of your manners, *and take heed lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.*

You must have a low taste indeed, if the bare gratification of appetite can prevail upon you at first to like debauchery. But it is not enough, that you are superior to the allurements of sensual pleasures; for even your own sociableness and modesty, if not conducted with prudence, may prove the most dangerous snares to your virtue. The former may be apt to lead you into loose company, and the latter to carry you along with them into all their excesses. But you may do well to remember, that as a mere fondness for company without distinction is no very commendable quality; so a fondness for debauched company is a vice, little, if at all, inferior to even a fondness for debauchery itself. In proportion as you grow more intimate with such persons, your aversion to their manners will wear off by degrees, till you come at last to imitate and approve them. They have, it may be, some good qualities, which tempt you to associate with them. You are pleased with their wit and chearfulness: and are you not shocked at their odious and abominable excesses? Can you find any great satisfaction in that society, where you must of necessity either reproach others by your singular moderation, or ruin yourself by a compliance with their humours? Is their conversation really so improving or so pleasant, as

that you should prefer it, though at the hazard of being infected with Intemperance, the worst of human plagues? But admit you escape the infection, you will share however in the infamy of their vices; for the world will conclude, and not without reason, that if you do not already, you soon will resemble the men, you chuse for your friends and companions. Besides, I hope, good-humour and wit are not peculiar to men of loose morals. You may doubtless find these qualities in as great perfection in persons, whose characters are thoroughly amiable, from whose conversation you may receive equal entertainment, without meeting with the like distaste, or running any hazard of being insensibly engaged in a dissolute life. It will therefore be an argument of your good taste, no less than of your prudence, if you avoid the intimacy of such as are debauched, whatever they may be in other respects. You may remember also, that to comply with the humour of your companions in any thing, that is contrary to the laws of God and reason, let men call this modesty, let them call it good-nature, or what they please, it is unmanly and shameful.

Wherefore it is but a poor excuse, which some urge in their own behalf; "I was got into such and such company, and was afraid of being ridiculed and thought singular." For first, what have you to do with such companions, whose ridicule you cannot bear, nor escape it without forfeiting your innocence? But I should rather ask; why do you regard
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the censures of those, who are despised by every wise and honest man? You should rather esteem it matter of glory than of blushing, when you are derided, by rakes and profligates, on account of sobriety. I don't say, you should make no account of their scorn; no, you ought to prize it, as the best testimony such persons are capable of bearing to your character and merit. If by mean compliances you seek to recommend yourself to the vile and licentious, these very persons will despise you in the end, and you are sure to be condemned by all the worthy part of mankind; whereas, if you steadily persevere in a course of virtue, the fools themselves, who now deride, will soon begin to reverence your character; or the honour and respect, you will infallibly gain from the wise and good, will make you rich amends for all the contempt they can pour upon you.

Upon the whole then, forfeit not upon any account the praise you have merited, in beginning life so well; and do not disappoint the hopes you have raised in your friends concerning you. Let it be your fixed resolution, at all times, and in all companies, to preserve your temperance. This will conduce to your outward prosperity and success in the world, and be a good step towards establishing a firm and lasting reputation. This will contribute not a little to the health and ease both of your body and mind. This will be one excellent qualification for being serviceable in society, and for creating in mankind a confidence in you.

This

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This will prepare you for a life at once the most pleasant, useful, and honourable.—In a word, in this plain humble virtue of temperance, the foundation is laid of every other virtue, and consequently of happiness in time and eternity.

SERMON

S E R M O N XIV.

The Instability of a double minded Man.

By the Rev. Mr. M A S O N.

J A M E S i. 8.

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

MAN is a variable creature. Every man is so; and does not differ from every body else more than he does, at some times, from himself.

This is a common observation. But that which the apostle takes notice of in the text is something more, viz. that there are some who are not only in different tempers at different times, but are governed by contrary principles, and have, as it were, two minds almost at all times, which occasions great instability of conduct, and inconsistency of character. They have contrary inclinations in their hearts, by which they are drawn contrary ways; and are so equally influenced by opposite objects, that they cannot with the full bent of their minds pursue either

either the one or the other ; but are continually halting, wavering, and vibrating between both ; sometimes inclined to this, and sometimes to that, according to the last impressions they received from either.

This unsteadiness and irresolution is a great weakness in our natures, and in nothing more visible than in our regards to those very different objects, the things of this world and those of the other ; under which view I shall now particularly consider it.

The words contain a proposition whose sense is independent of the context ; and therefore I shall take up no time in a critical examination of that. — The proposition itself consists of two parts.

- I. The character of one who is irresolute and unfixed in his leading views and desires. He is a *double minded man*.
- II. The effect of such an unsteady, wavering disposition. It produces a strange instability and inconsistency of conduct. *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

These two things I shall particularly consider ; and then shew you the practical improvement that ought to be made of this subject at large.

I. We have the character of one who is irresolute and unfixed in his leading views and desires. He is a *double minded man*.

His mind is divided between God and the world. He sacrifices both to God and Mammon. He aims at what our Saviour says is impossible ; and would serve two contrary masters.

ters. He loves this world most passionately and supremely, and would be thought to love God as much. He retains all his worldly lusts, his pride, his passion, his covetousness, his self-sufficiency, his worldly dependance, and his strong affection for vanity. And yet he dares not cast off all regard for religion neither. He dares not renounce Christianity and his conscience; but would be thought to have as great a regard for his soul as other men. And some regard for it he has; and more especially at some times. When his mind is cool and sober, and free from those worldly passions which so generally inflame it; when he is brought into a thoughtful mood by reading some serious book in private, or hearing some warm and awakening discourse in public; he is then full of self-reproaches; he severely blames his temper and conduct; and calls himself a thousand fools for being so passionately fond of vanity, and living so forgetful of eternity and his immortal soul. Then his good purposes return, and he is all for God and heaven and immortality. And *Vanity of vanities* he pronounces upon every thing else.

And happy were it for him if such a frame continued, if he could preserve this good disposition. But alas, *like a morning cloud, or as the early dew*, it is soon gone. The very next morning perhaps, (for we will suppose these good thoughts and purposes to return upon him in the evening of the Lord's day) as soon as he is engaged in the affairs of the world, his heart takes fire again, and all the unhallowed passions are rekindled. The prospect of gain, or pleasure,

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sure, or preferment, transports him; he breaks through every obligation of reason and religion, all the restraints of decency, honour and reputation, to gratify his governing passion. His conscience is silenced. He is now assured that worldly gain is substantial good. He sees, and feels it to be so; let weak minds and speculative men think and say what they will. The world is his God, and he will adore it.

And in this idolatry he is very zealous and devout; till it be interrupted by the unwelcome return of that holy day, when he is again called off from the world to the worship of the true God. And then, after the first uneasiness of having such a check put upon the bent of his inclinations is a little over, his mind begins to be sedate and serious again. And then his devotion and self-reproaches return upon him together; till, as before, they both vanish again at the very next scene and prospect of worldly advantage that offers.

This is a brief and general description of a *double minded man*. But more particularly, this expression denotes a great variation in all the three leading powers of the mind, the understanding, will, and affections.

1. His understanding is various. His sentiments at one time are very different from what they are at another. He sees things through a different medium, and in a different light; and therefore his apprehension and judgment of them is different at different times.

Now he apprehends the value of his soul and the vanity of the world; sees the worth and excellency

cellency of religion in the clearest light, and is convinced that nothing but heaven ought to be the object of his chief care and main pursuit. He readily falls in with, and feels the weight of Solomon's sentiments, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.* And joins with him in the conclusion of the whole matter, that *to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole of man*, Eccl. xii. 13.

And were this frame to continue, what an excellent Christian would he be! How great an alteration should we soon see in the man! What seriousness and sobriety, instead of sloth and sensuality! — But alas, he is presently another man. He goes into company and the world, and his heart receives its old tincture. His thoughts and sentiments are quite altered. His temper as vain, as light, as earthly as ever. He thinks he may and ought to love the world, and indulge his passions and his pleasures. And herein he does nothing but what he sees almost every body else do. He looks upon those ministers and authors who speak and write so freely of the vanity of these things, as too precise and stiff by far; and fancies it is only the effect of spleen and envy, of a narrow spirit or an ignorance of the world. "That it is talking in our own way; and he will bear with us because we know no better. But men of genius, wit, and spirit, talk and think in a different strain." And therefore he concludes that his former thoughts of the matter were only the effects of a gloomy imagination, or a melancholy turn of mind. — And thus does he think about the most important things as differently

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ferently from himself as if he had actually two understandings.

2. The *double minded man* moreover acts as if he had two wills. For instance, with regard to any particular duty; sometimes he finds himself readily enough inclined to it, at other times he is most averse and reluctant; and can scarce with all the command he hath over himself persuade his heart to set about it. At one time he goes to it with delight, at another time he can hardly drag his backward mind even to the dullest performance of it.

So with respect to any particular sin; at one time he can venture upon it without scruple, at another time his conscience startles and hesitates. Now his will is set towards his duty, now towards his lusts. Now he minds carnal, and now spiritual things. And thus he becomes a perpetual contradiction to himself.

Nay, with respect to the same action, or the same object, his will is often drawn two contrary ways at the same time.

3. The *double minded man* will find the same diversity and contrariety in the other leading power of his soul, the affections: which are spiritual or carnal, serious or sensual, heavenly or worldly, just as the two contrary principles of flesh and spirit prevail in him; which alternately sway the mind; and of which alternate sway, this variableness of temper I am now treating of, is the certain effect.

How devout and heavenly are our affections some times, when we get nearest to God, and are carried in our contemplations to eternal and
invisible

invisible things! After that we are ready to imagine that nothing mortal could ever move us. But we soon come down to earth again; when our hearts presently begin to hover over the world, and cling, and clasp, and center to it again as closely as if it were indeed our rest, and we regretted a short absence from it.

Thus have we taken a brief view of the *double minded man*. An unhappy character; but none more common. Such an unsteady, wavering, inconstant, vague and variable temper we observe and smile at in children, who discover it in the lowest things; but we neither see nor pity it in ourselves, who discover it more in the highest concerns. But let us now,

II. Consider briefly the effect of this unhappy temper mentioned in the text.

This variability of temper, the apostle James saith, is always attended with an instability of conduct. *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.* That is, in all those instances in which his heart is so divided, his behaviour must be incoherent and various. His conduct is as unsteady as his temper. But as I have confined this to things of religion, I shall consider that, which is the effect of it, under the same restriction.

Now this instability of a *double minded man's* conduct (though it be evident enough of itself, as the effect of his temper, yet) it may not be amiss briefly to represent under three different views.

I. He is inconstant in his purposes and pursuits. This is a natural effect of that divided

mind we are speaking of. So it was with the revolting Jews in the prophet's time. *Their heart is divided* (saith God) i. e. between me and Baal; *therefore shall they be found faulty; and are as an empty vine*, Hof. x. 2. Were the heart once fixed to a point, it would soon know what to purpose and prosecute; but having no steady certain views, it must of consequence be undetermined. What it desires at one time, it despises at another; soon flies from what it before pursued; and again pursues what it lately so industriously avoided.

Thus a *double minded man* spends his whole life, as it were, in doing and undoing; in sinning and repenting; till his last summons comes, and then indeed he is determined. Death, or the near and certain prospect of it, fixes his views entirely for God and heaven; but it is under the amazement and horror of this reflection, "that he hath but a few hours to do that in, which ought to have been the business of his life, but which he could never before fully find in his heart to make so." However variable and changing the heart may be in life, it will be fixed in death. But then it may be too late.

2. Another effect of such a divided heart is, that it can seldom in good earnest fall in with the dictates of conscience in the plainest instances of duty. Be the duty ever so important, the call of providence ever so loud, the voice of conscience ever so strong, there is something within that draws him back, and makes him dull, cold and reluctant, where others are, and

he himself ought to be, all life, spirit and zeal. He drags heavily towards it, as if every action that is sacred to God were a clog upon his life and liberty; and religion, which was designed to set him free from the captivity of sin, were itself his greatest chain.—— Thus it is at those times when the carnal part of his temper prevails, as it generally does.

3. *The double minded man* is easily overcome in an hour of temptation. The faint purposes of mind which he sometimes hath for God and goodness are no guard upon him against a sudden surprise. His good impressions are all lost; and have left nothing behind them to be an anchor and stay to his soul under a violent or unexpected assault of the tempter, so that he readily yields. Which he hath no sooner done than he repents. And under the very next temptation sins again. And then repents again. And thus *unstable is he in all his ways*.

I might farther illustrate this by considering his behaviour in a time of prosperity and adversity, when the *double minded man* is quite different from himself, and the instability of his ways is most apparent. But what hath been said already, I apprehend, is sufficient to explain that unhappy weakness of our nature which the apostle speaks of in the text. I shall therefore now address myself to a particular improvement of the subject.

A P P L I C A T I O N.

We have now had this unhappy temper mentioned in the text particularly described to

us, together with some of its mischievous effects. It is what we are all of us in some degree or other subject to, and we ought to be ashamed and humbled at the thought; considering what infinite reason there is that the mind should be fixed, entirely fixed, for God, and heaven and the concerns of eternity.

There is indeed a more wretched temper still than that I have described. And that is a steady disposition to sin. Where the mind is fixed, but fixed the wrong way, so that it hath scarce any variation towards the things of God and another world. Such a man indeed is not *unstable in all his ways*, but determined, resolute, and unalterably bent and settled one way, and that is the wrong. But as this is what my text does not lead me directly to consider, I shall take no further notice of it.

But as that variableness of temper and instability of conduct with regard to religion before described, are what we have all of us too much reason to complain of, I therefore propose, that I may apply the subject in a proper manner,

- I. To shew you, to what objects our main views ought always to be determined.
- II. In what manner we are to fix them.
- III. Conclude all with an affectionate address to the double minded man.

I. Let us seriously consider what are those objects to which our main views ought always to be determined.

And

III And here, reader, give me leave to address myself to you in the closest and plainest manner possible, as a reasonable creature. For that which takes hold of our reason, understanding, and conscience, sticks the longest by us. Whereas the impressions that are made upon the mind by an artful or vehement address to the passions only, are soon gone, and leave no good effect behind them. And besides, they may be raised upon any subject, may lead a man any way, and very often lead him the wrong way. But the convictions of conscience and sound reason will always lead him right.—Thus then would I conduct you gradually, step by step, to that which is your great duty and concern in the present affair. And I beseech you follow me with your attention.—Use your understanding as an intelligent creature, for the interests of your immortal soul, (you will readily enough use it for your lesser interests) and often think on the following considerations and apply them.

I. Then, there is no man but what hath and must have some leading views in life; some grand point at which he aims; and to which he makes almost all his other views subservient. There is something which he wishes to be or have above every thing else; which employs his thoughts, animates his hopes, excites his cares, and governs his conduct. For there is no man so absolutely indifferent as to live entirely at random, without having some great end in eye, unless he be wrong in his intellects, and bordering upon ideotism.

2. Common understanding and reason will lead a man to examine what this great end is that he drives at. Whether it be really worth the drift and labour of his life; what it was that put him upon this pursuit at first; and how he came to be so steady and eager in it; whether it will lead him, and how it will end; whither it be a course of conduct suitable to the choice and character of a mortal creature, placed in this world for a little while, and who is to live for ever in another; that is, in short, whether his leading views are right or wrong; and whether they will make him happy or miserable in the end. For to be indifferent about this most material point is to divest ourselves of the nobility of our natures, and to act very unbecoming the dignity and character of reasonable creatures.

When the ship is in full sail before the wind, the pilot must be a fool or a madman that never examines her course, and is unconcerned whether she is making this speed to the right or the wrong port; whether she be in a safe road or among the shelves.

3. Every man then, as a reasonable creature endowed by his Maker with reflection and understanding, should take special care that his governing aims be right. He should determine and fix his proper character, and stick to that invariably; however variable his situation and circumstances in the world may be.

This is the first thing we are to do in setting out in life, to consider with ourselves thus.—

“What a vast variety of characters do I see in
“the

“ the world! How various and how contrary
“ are the dispositions and pursuits of mankind!
“ And yet this busy species of mortals have all
“ but one great end to aim at; and that is, *to*
“ *be happy in another world.* But, O! how
“ miserably do they appear in general to forget
“ or mistake that end; while they seem to
“ center all their views in this! — Well, I
“ am one of these busy mortals, placed in the
“ same condition, and acting on the same stage
“ of vanity. O, guard me, gracious God, from
“ the general delusion! Suffer me to pursue
“ nothing as my great end, but what will issue
“ in my true happiness; to make nothing my
“ main pursuit in life, but what will yield me
“ solid comfort in death. Teach me the way
“ *in which I should go,* and let me *never depart*
“ *from it;* till it conduct me to myself, O thou
“ great fountain of all felicity, and existence,
“ and the author of mine!”

4. Before we can know what ought to be our great and governing views, we must know what we are, and what we are designed for.

1. What we are. — We are creatures endowed with an immortal as well as a corruptible nature, capable of spiritual employments, and a spiritual happiness. Our souls are the better part of us; whose peace and well-being therefore we should principally regard and provide for. We are to be as we are, but a little while. Death will soon dissolve this frame, take down this crazy tabernacle, and set the soul at liberty; when we must for ever leave this world, for another we shall never leave.

Were this single thought but to be familiar with us, and every day recollected, it would be a happy expedient to regulate and moderate our worldly desires and pursuits, and fix our governing views aright. And there is no thought can be more important, can concern us more, or that ought to be more frequently admitted.

2. We should also frequently think with ourselves what we are designed for. It is most certain we were not designed for a long continuance in this world, or for happiness in it. The present circumstances of mortal life, take them at the best, are incompatible with true happiness. If every man in his best state on earth is *altogether vanity*, how then can he be happy? We are designed for another state, into which we are every one of us soon to pass; and that state is eternal; and our condition there will be according to our behaviour here: if we behave well here, we shall be happy there: and it is the favour, and presence, and love of God that will be our happiness there; for no creature can be happy but in the favour of it's Creator: and this final, full and everlasting happiness we were designed for; and our gracious God hath given us the greatest advantage, helps and opportunities to secure it; and nothing but our own wretched, foolish, wrong choice, and wilful perseverance therein can rob us of it.

There is no one can deny the truth or the importance of these principles. And the reason they have so little effect upon us to make us wise and serious is, because they are too seldom

dom attended to. But recollect and ponder them well, and it will appear from hence with the highest degree of evidence,

5. That to serve and please and fear that great God that gave us being, is our great concern; and ought at all times to be our governing view as reasonable creatures born for immortality. This is the result of all our reasonings concerning the proper happiness of the human nature, as it was of all the royal philosopher's experiments and expedients in search of it. When he had proved and pronounced every thing else to be *vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit*. Now, saith he, let us bear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man, Eccl. xii. 13. His whole concern the point to which he ought to bend all his thoughts, and cares, and desires; his whole duty now, and his whole happiness hereafter.—This then should be our governing view; this our grand aim through life; to be approved of our Maker, and to be happy in his love; and to that end, to serve him with fear and fidelity all our days.

Let this then be our steady and invariable view, this the great principle by which we are acted in every circumstance in life, and this the character which we will resolve to maintain and live up to at all times, viz. a friend, a servant, and lover of God.

Thus shall we ever keep our final happiness in eye; be fixed to a point; and no longer driven by every wind of opinion, or impulse
of

of passion, or blast of temptation; no longer *double minded* in our views, or *unstable* in our ways, but steady, uniform and constant the right way. Which will be a wonderful satisfaction to us, however little progress we make in it. Though we move but slow, it is a comfort to think we are right. And it is much better to be slow and cautious in the right way, than to be swift and confident in the wrong.

Well, thus far then I am sensible we are convinced. We acknowledge this is true. That thus the mind ought always to be set and directed. That this is our grand concern, and ought to be our leading principle; and that we act not a wise and rational, but a most absurd and inconsistent part, unworthy our name and character as reasonable creatures, if we do not make it so. — And this conviction were something, if it were lasting. But, alas, the very next bait the world throws out, we greedily catch at; and quite forget again that we have immortal souls, and have no happiness in this world, and are living for eternity. This therefore brings me to the second thing I proposed in the application of the subject, viz.

II. To consider how this conviction may be fixed. Or what it is that is most like to engage us to make the service and honour of God, and the happiness of our souls, our great and governing view through life, and all other ends subordinate to this; or what considerations have most power to fix the mind to this point, to prevent its being so wavering and unstable as we too commonly find it is.

Now

Now here I might mention many directions and considerations which might be helpful to you in this affair. But I shall mention but one, for this reason, because if it hath no force or effect upon you, I utterly despair that any else will. And it is this. Think every day you live of that eternity to which you are every day hastening.

This thought well weighed, surely must make us serious, and awaken all the powers of our souls in good earnest to make our immortal interests our chief care. At least, if this do not, nothing can. Nothing but an almighty and sovereign act of divine grace overpowering all opposition, which we can never expect, if we will not as reasonable creatures think and act for ourselves.

Think, I beseech you, what eternity is; and how near you are to it. And be amazed that you have thought of your eternal interest so little, and that you have neglected it so long. The world you are going into you must be for ever in; this you are now in, you are going out of, and must soon for ever leave. And to spend all your time and care to heap up riches in it, or to enjoy the pleasure of it, is the vainest and very emptiest delusion that ever the silly heart of man was cheated with, and shews an insensibility shameful to the dignity of a thinking soul.

The thoughts of eternity will convince you of this folly, and fix your views for your best interests, if any thing can. But these thoughts must not be transient, cold, and desultory, but fixed;

fixed, intent, and frequent. The soul must be wrapped up, and wholly possessed with the contemplation, and be carried forward by it to infinite ages to come.

Suppose now death hath done his office, the soul dislodged and launched into the eternal world, judgment past, and its state fixed for ever, ten thousand ages past and gone — ten thousand millions more — and eternity but still beginning—Ah, what will you think of the few moments of busy vanity which you just remember you once spent on earth?—Shall you not many millions of ages hence even quite forget that little momentary duration you had on earth? forget that you ever lived here? — Or if you shall remember it for ever, what will you think of it? Shall you think of it in the same manner you do now? And think the things of it to be as important as you do now? — It is most certain you will not. No, no, your eyes will be then opened for ever. And if you are happy, you will not help upbraiding yourself in the midst of all your bliss, that you did no more for your God, and your dear Redeemer, and your immortal soul, during that very little space of time which was allowed you on earth to prepare for eternity in. And if you are miserable, your incessant self-reproaches will be insupportable, that with all your affected wit and wisdom, you should still be that stupid fool, to suffer yourself to be so gulled by vain appearances and the false images of fancy, as to forget eternity and neglect your everlasting interests; though you was often importuned,
called

called upon, and most earnestly intreated to think of and provide for them in time.

Reader, I know not how these thoughts may affect your mind; they have often affected my own; and have placed the vain views and wrong pursuits of mankind in the most amazing light. So that I am fully convinced, it is for want of admitting these thoughts more frequently and more seriously, that men are generally so divided in their minds, and so inconstant in their ways; so hankering and suspended between this world and another: and that nothing tends more strongly to bring the soul to a point, and give it a right bias, than frequently to think with ourselves, what that other world is into which we are passing: and above all, that what ever it is, it will be eternal.

3. I shall conclude all now with a short exhortatory address to the *double minded man*; who hath hitherto been *unstable in all his ways*, of wavering and unsteady in his regards to his immortal interests.

Hast thou lived now like a reasonable creature? Can thy own conscience or reason acquit thee? — For shame, never value thyself upon thy wisdom more whilst thy conduct thus proclaims thy folly. — And canst thou not after all find in thine heart to be in good earnest about thine everlasting well-being? Are thy earthly interests indeed of so much greater concern to thee? And wilt thou, man, stand by that resolution at death? — no, thou canst not. Why then, I beseech you, why will you chuse to live by those principles, by

by which you know you dare not die? Is this to act like a man? — And yet thou hast the understanding of a man; and sense and reason and conscience too; which inform thee better; and the word of God and the Spirit of God often call upon thee to chuse a better part. And shall not all this determine thee? Shall one clod of this base earth outweigh in thy esteem; or keep the balance even against God, and heaven, and eternal happiness; in the opposite scale? — Think with thyself: can any thing possibly equal such stupidity? — Thou wilt soon be of one mind. No dying man is *double minded*. Be of the same mind now as thou wilt be of then. And suffer thyself no longer to be divided and deluded by foolish appetites and false appearances. For thou canst not in thine own reason believe that this vain and transitory world thou art going out of, ought to be held in equal esteem with that eternal happiness which God in his word hath offered to thee.

I shall conclude all with Elijah's proposal to the people of Israel, 1 Kings xviii. 21. *How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.* Chuse now the alternative: determine one way or other. If you are resolved for God, cleave to him then with all your heart; if heaven be your aim, seek it in good earnest. And learn to contemn the world, which hath so long divided your heart, and been an unworthy competitor, with your Maker. — But if you are determined for this world, and seek all

your happiness here; throw off then the uneasy restraints and obligations of conscience and religion, which will but cramp and shackle you in your pursuits of an earthly felicity. And let not your heart be any longer thus distracted and divided between God and Mammon. — But this latter choice you cannot make. You tremble at the very thought. What remains then, but that you make the former, and make it in good earnest, and stand by it for ever?

In fine then, let God have all our hearts, and eternity more of our thoughts. And let the future part of our lives shew, that we are in good earnest determined for God, and seek all our happiness from him and his love, as the fountain of everlasting joy. Amen.

W E have no need to affect (as some seem to do) * to magnify the miseries of mortal life. If we take but a general survey of them, on a moderate computation, with all the alleviations of mercy which they are mixed, we shall see but too much reason to conclude, with Solomon, that human life is vain, and with Job, that man is born into trouble as the sparks fly upward. Job v. 7.

* See Young's True Estimate of Human Life.

S E R -

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S E R M O N XV.

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your hand, and stand by it for ever?

good enough, and stand by it for ever? And
let the more of our thoughts. And let the
the part of our lives there, that we are in good
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of everlasting life.

By the Rev. Mr. MASON.

HEB. XII. 11.

*Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be
joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward
it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness,
unto them which are exercised thereby.*

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eries of mortal life. If we take but a general
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trouble as the sparks fly upward.* Job v. 7.

* See YOUNG'S True Estimate of Human Life.

In such a situation now, what doth wisdom dictate? What doth right reason direct? But to arm and fortify ourselves before-hand against these unavoidable evils; that we may bear them in the best and easiest manner when they overtake us. And the best way to bear Afflictions is, not to neglect or slight them on the one hand; nor to sink under them on the other. Or as it is better expressed, in verse the fifth, before the text, *not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when we are rebuked of him.*

And that this is the best way of suffering Afflictions appears from hence, because it at once renders us more able to bear them, and better disposed to receive benefit from them. And a greater motive or inducement to engage us to bear our Afflictions in this manner, cannot be urged, than that which is suggested to us in the words of the text; viz. that they are the chastisements of our heavenly Father's hand; and though grievous at present, yet are sent to produce the most happy and beneficial effects. *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby.*

Without any further comment on the words, I shall proceed to open and improve them for our instruction in the following manner.

I. I shall endeavour to shew you, what are those *Fruits of righteousness*, which the divine chastenings are sent to produce.

II. Why they are called *peaceable Fruits of righteousness*.

III. In whom Afflictions produce these good effects.

IV. What is necessary on our part to secure them.

Lastly, I shall make a proper improvement of the subject.

I. I am to shew you, what are those *Fruits of righteousness* which the divine chastenings are sent to produce.

No chastening, saith the apostle, *for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.* The former part of the words is too sensibly verified by our own frequent experience to need any proof. Afflictions are grievous. If they were not so, they would not be Afflictions. If we did not feel the chastenings of the divine hand, they would not answer their end.

However it may not be amiss here to observe—— That some are exercised with much more grievous Afflictions than others. And the same Afflictions are not equally grievous to all. But of whatsoever kind or degree they are, here lies our comfort, that they are all inflicted by our heavenly Father's hand: who never punishes his children but for their good, but if need be, and never more than he will give them strength to bear. This we are as firmly and as fully assured of, as we are that he is our Father, a wise, kind and tender Father, and has (as surely he must have) a paternal compassion for all his offspring. It is necessary therefore that Afflictions be grievous,

in order to work out the *peaceable fruits of righteousness*.

Fruits of righteousness is a Hebrew form of speech, by which we are to understand righteous fruits; or whatever tends to purify and exalt the soul, and render it more righteous and holy in the sight of God. For as sin pollutes and debases the mind, righteousness refines and dignifies it; which is the frequent effect of its being tried, like metal, in the furnace of Affliction. But to come closer to the point.

Those *Fruits of righteousness*, or those righteous Fruits, which Afflictions are intended to produce, are such as these.

1. The mortification of our sinful lusts.
2. A more warm and active zeal and diligence in the great duties of life and religion.
3. The improvement of those divine virtues and graces in which we have been too defective.

1. The mortification of our sinful lusts.

And the sins which adversity was chiefly designed to mortify, are those which are most apt to rise out of prosperity. I shall mention but two, viz. pride and worldly-mindedness.

- 1.) One end and design of Affliction is to take away our pride.

A rank weed which often takes root, springs up, and rises high, under the sunshine of prosperity, (especially where the soil is fat and fertile) and is hardly eradicated by all the cold and chilling blasts of adversity.

But how does adversity make a man humble? Why, it sets him on thinking; thinking in good earnest; not in that low, false, formal, and superficial manner he did before, but with concern and intenseness. His thoughts are now just, deep, and penetrating. He feels them, and sometimes is almost afraid of them. He thinks in a manner he never did (and wonders he never did) before. He takes a larger view and scope in the meditations of his mind, and begins to examine things seriously from the bottom. He looks backward to things past, and forward to things future; turns his thoughts inward and outward, upward and downward, and all with a solicitous desire to find some solid foundation to rest upon; to know the true state of his case, and where he may have leave to hope. And the result of all this deep thought and self-research is generally this, the language of Job in the same case, *Behold I am vile*, Job xl. 4. We then see more amiss in our hearts and tempers than we ever saw before: more neglects and defects than we ever thought ourselves guilty of, for want of this self-inspection, and thorough inward scrutiny. We then see nothing to nourish and feed our pride, but many, very many things to excite our shame and self-abasement.

A very happy Fruit of Affliction this. For when the soul is once thoroughly humbled, it is then in the most happy disposition to receive the best instruction and the sweetest consolation: both which the latent pride of our heart

heart rendered us very incapable of receiving before.

2.) Another spiritual evil which Afflictions are particularly sent to mortify, is our worldly-mindedness.

A very bad habit, which we are too apt to indulge in a state of ease and affluence. When *our mountain stands strong*, we are ready to imagine, with the Psalmist, that we *shall never be moved*, that we shall never be in adversity: forgetting the mutability of things, and the vicissitude to which a mortal state is subject. Though instances thereof are every day reaching our eyes or ears, yet, how it is I know not, but almost every one seems to think, or seems to live, as if he thought himself exempted from this common condition of mortality, and though he sails among rocks and shelves, and is every minute in danger of being wrecked, yet seems as fearless as if he were on shore.

Afflictions therefore are necessary to awaken us to a proper sense of our outward as well as our inward state; to convince us of the vanity of the world, as well as the vileness of the heart; to remove our false confidences, and turn our hopes to more substantial things; and to teach us by experience, what we are so unapt to learn by information, that *every man at his best state is altogether vanity.* Psalm xxxix. v.

And the mortification of these lusts of the mind, is the more necessary, as they are connected with many others: pride with passion, impatience, discontent, murmuring, self-con-

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fidence, slander, revenge and cruelty; and worldly-mindedness with avarice, deceit, self-sufficiency, oppression, excess and irreligion; and because the contrary virtues of humility and heavenly-mindedness are of great use for the right improvement of all our Afflictions.

2. Another beneficial Fruit of Affliction is a more warm and active zeal and diligence in all the great duties of life and religion.

When a long and severe distemper sinks and weakens all our animal and mental powers, deprives us of every capacity of active usefulness, and throws us wholly upon the friendly care and assistance of others; I say, under such useless and helpless circumstances, it is natural for us to reflect upon the many talents and opportunities of doing good, which we had long enjoyed but lost; which we were once favoured with, but of which we are now deprived, and under the sad apprehension, perhaps, that they will never more return. Now we begin to regret our past negligence and sloth, and to think how much more good we might have done in the world than we have done; to consider what account we can give of the talents we have received, if we should now be called to the bar of God; and to form the most serious and solemn resolves to redeem our time, and improve our advantages (if it shall please God to spare us) to better purpose than we have hitherto done.

And if God is pleased in his great mercy, and in answer to our prayers, to restore to us our wonted comforts and capacities, we cannot

not readily forget the good purposes we formed. And the remembrance of them, if we have any sensibility left, will excite us to put them in execution; by redoubled diligence and zeal in improving those opportunities and advantages better, of which we have so precarious a possession. Especially when hereto we add this thought (which is a very natural one) that if our misimproved time and neglected talents lay with so much weight upon our conscience in our day of Affliction, how much greater pain and anguish will it give us to think, under a future Affliction, that they have been again neglected and misimproved as before, notwithstanding so fair a warning, and so many purposes to improve them better. Therefore, to prevent these comfortless and insupportable reflections hereafter, we shall naturally be excited to greater diligence in all the duties of our station, and to greater zeal and sincerity in our addresses to God, for his grace to strengthen and assist us.

But beside this, there is another motive to zeal and diligence, with which a good man is actuated in such a case as this, arising from a principle of gratitude to God for the mercy he hath received. The pious grateful soul thinks he can never do enough for that God, who, in answer to his fervent prayers, so seasonably interposed for his deliverance, and restored to him the blessings he so earnestly desired. And the language of his heart will be that of the apostle Paul, immediately after

his conversion, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Acts ix. 6.

I can hardly think but that every good man must find himself affected in some such manner as this, upon emerging out of any deep Affliction. And when he is, it is very apparent how much he will be excited hereby to greater care and assiduity in all the important duties of his character. Which is another very considerable benefit intended, and often produced, by adverse providences. But,

3. Another good Fruit of Affliction is manifest in the visible growth and improvement of those particular virtues and graces in which we have been too deficient.

It is not unlikely but that Afflictions may sometimes be sent with an immediate view to the cultivation of some particular disposition in the mind. However, it is certain that they are always sent for the Christian's spiritual advantage in general: which end can no otherwise be answered, than by the improvement of those particular graces which constitute his Christian character. And these, I apprehend, are principally intended in the text by *the peaceable Fruits of righteousness*. Some of them therefore I shall particularly specify.

1.) One great design of Affliction is to revive our regards to God: and to engage us to seek our happiness from, and fix our dependance only upon him.

It is a sad thing to say it, (but nothing is more common, and nothing a plainer sign of the obliquity of the human heart than this)
that

that the very gifts and bounties of our heavenly Father's hand, which were designed to engage us more to himself, are oftentimes the very things which most of all draw off and alienate our hearts from him. How many, instead of loving him more, seem to love him less for the distinguishing benefits he bestows on them? abuse his choicest favours to his dishonour! and place all their confidence (not on him, but) on the very gifts his hand bestows, without any regard to the giver! As if the hand that gave them, could not as easily take them back. This is a great evil, and one of the most egregious follies that ever seized the heart of man: entirely owing to the intoxicating nature of earthly prosperity, working upon the weakness of the human heart, and making it vain, thoughtless, and unattentive to the true nature of things.

The discipline of adversity now was designed to correct this vanity, and cure this weakness, by shewing us the folly of our false confidences, and by fixing our dependence where alone it ought to be placed, viz. on God himself. When our tottering reed is crushed, and fails us, we then seek out for a stronger support. When our broken cisterns are drained, we repair to the fountain. And why did we not before? The nature of things was the same then as now. True; but our notions of them were different. And here lies the great benefit of adversity. It corrects our errors, gives us a juster notion of things, and teaches us to think better. And what can be a greater error, what

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what a falser notion, than to suppose the gift is to be preferred to the giver? To become indifferent to the greatest good, and to set our hearts on that which may, nay, that which will, nay, that which we know will most certainly disappoint our trust!

2.) Another Christian virtue which Afflictions are very proper to cultivate, is humility.

Pride, I have before observed, is often the Fruit of prosperity; oftener, it is to be feared, than humility is of adversity. For when that vice has once taken deep root in the heart, the roughest storms of trouble can scarce subdue it. However, I say, Afflictions are a very proper means in themselves to promote humility, and seldom fail to do it, when the heart is in any degree previously disposed to it. Because they set before us, in a very striking manner, the frailty of our nature; and incline us to deep thought and impartial self-research. And there needs no more than this, to give us those mortifying views of our defects which will infallibly humble us.

And this indeed is one of the greatest benefits we receive from Afflictions. Because when this virtue hath once taken possession of the heart, it immediately drives from thence all those vices which are found in the train of pride; and gives it the best disposition to do and receive the greatest good. The self-emptied soul is most capable of being filled with *the peaceable fruits of righteousness*.

3.) Patience is another grace that is often much improved by Afflictions.

For

For without them it could have no exercise or trial. A Christian would have no opportunity of knowing what improvement he makes in this virtue, if he met with no disappointments and sufferings to put it to the proof. And all the Christian virtues are best improved by frequent exercise. *Tribulation worketh patience.* Rom. v. 3.

This is a grace peculiar to a state of probation and discipline; we shall have no occasion for it in a world of perfection and pleasure, which we hope to enter upon when we depart out of this. But it is of most excellent use to us whilst we are here; because, like humility (from whence it springs) it disposes us to bear Afflictions in the best manner, and prepares us to receive from them the greatest good. And when it hath its perfect work; that is, when it is displayed in all its strength and glory of meekness, and remains invariable, unconquered, and unmoved to the end, how lovely doth it appear in the eyes both of God and man! in a word, it lightens every load, as it confirms and strengthens the heart to bear it. And therefore it is with great reason that every serious and sensible soul under Affliction, makes it the matter of his most earnest prayer.

4.) Another Christian grace which Afflictions are sent to exercise and strengthen, is faith.

This, as well as that I last mentioned, is proper to the present life; after which it will be done away, and turned into vision.

Faith is a Christian's cardinal virtue; and operates mightily on the soul for its support
under

under Afflictions, as it brings to its near prospect the happy and everlasting period of them all; transports its views into the world of bliss and joy, with which, it assures the soul, all the sufferings of the present world are not worthy to be compared; and of which, after some thousand years of enjoyment there, we shall entirely lose the remembrance. But why should I say, after some thousand years? The very instant we enter upon those unspeakable joys, we shall be so wholly possessed and swallowed up in them, as immediately to forget all the past sufferings of our mortal state; or bless God for fitting us, by the means of them, for such exalted heights of bliss. We shall then be convinced (of what we find it now so hard to persuade ourselves) that they were all designed in mercy; all for our good; all the effects of our heavenly Father's love, and of his steady regard to our highest interest; that he chose better for us than we could have done for ourselves; and that if we had been left to our own choice, and could have seen to the issue and consequences of things, we should ourselves have chosen the very lot which he appointed us, however grievous it may now seem to be. For faith enlarges our prospects, teaches us to see farther, and therefore to judge better.

But how do Afflictions strengthen and increase the Christian's faith? Why, in the way I have just now mentioned, viz. as they prepare and dispose him to extend his prospects forward to another world, whereas in a time of prosperity he is too apt to confine them to this. When the

the thoughtful soul finds itself stript of the pleasures and joys of the present life, it will naturally stretch itself forth toward some more permanent and substantial good, and contemplate the felicities of the future state. And if it hath any good hope of a title to them, it will dwell on the supporting theme, take many a delightful excursion into the unseen world, and endeavour to penetrate the dark veil that intercepts its glories. And by these sublime exercises of the mind, the Christian's faith will be gradually strengthened and confirmed.

5.) Submission and resignation to the will of God is another Christian grace that is often much improved by Affliction.

It is indeed the genuine effect of faith and patience, but capable of a distinct consideration from them: and is that happy temper of mind which our blessed Saviour exemplified under his deepest sorrows, when he said, *O my Father, — thy will be done.* Mat. xxvi.

42. When the soul is once brought to a full and unreserved submission to the whole will of God, it is then (and never till then) at perfect rest.

Lastly, An increase of heavenly mindedness, is another good Fruit that is often produced by Afflictions.

And to produce this indeed they have the directest tendency. For when the soul is well weary of this world, it will naturally begin to look out, and long for a better. It will live with heaven more steadily in its eye; and look

look upon present things in another light; and consider them in their connexion with, and relation to, the concerns of a better world: and will adjust its regards to objects and events in proportion as they tend to subserve (not so much its present as) its future and everlasting happiness.

These now are some of those *peaceable fruits of righteousness*, which the joyless Afflictions of this life are sent to work out, and which they actually do work out for many that are exercised thereby.

“Why they are called peaceable Fruits of righteousness; who those are that enjoy them; and what is necessary on our part, in order thereunto”—were the other things I proposed to consider on this argument. But these I must reserve for the subject of the next discourse. And shall conclude all at present with two brief reflections.

1. If so much good often comes of Afflictions, how wrong is it then for the generality of mankind to look upon them as evil?

In appearance indeed they are so; and in themselves they are not joyous (no, far from it!) but sometimes very grievous; and therefore as such are not desirable. But considered in their effects, tendency and end; they are often productive of the greatest good, and therefore are not to be dreaded or deprecated absolutely as real evils. For if they were, they would never fall to the lot of good men.

2. We hence see how a Christian is *made perfect through sufferings*.

As

As they are leading him to a perfection of grace, and fitting him for a perfection of glory. This phrase indeed, as applied by the apostle to the captain of our salvation, Heb. ii. 10. is to be taken in another sense; but when applied to his followers, it must always be taken in this.

Now may the God of all grace, who hath called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that we have suffered a while, make us perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle us! to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XVI.

The good Fruits of Afflictions.

By the Rev. Mr. MASON.

HEB. xii. 11.

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby.

IN discoursing upon these words I proposed,
I. To consider what are those *Fruits of righteousness* which the divine chastenings are sent to produce.

II. Why they are called *peaceable Fruits of righteousness*.

III. In whom Afflictions produce these good effects.

IV. What is necessary on our part to secure them.

Lastly, To make a proper improvement of the subject.

I. What are those *Fruits of righteousness* which the divine chastenings are sent to produce.

Which may be supposed to be such as these.

1. The mortification of our sinful lusts.
2. A more warm and active zeal and diligence in the great duties of life and religion.
3. The improvement of certain divine virtues and graces in which we may have been too deficient. Particularly, a constant regard to God, humility, patience, faith, resignation, and heavenly-mindedness. Each of which, afflictive providences have a peculiar tendency to quicken and cultivate.

I proceed now to the second thing I proposed, *viz.*

II. To consider why these are called the *peaceable Fruits of righteousness*.

And I apprehend they are so called for these two reasons.

1. Because they will help us to bear Afflictions with the most quiet and peaceable temper of mind whilst we are under them.
2. Because they give it an habitual peace and serenity afterwards.

1. They are called peaceable Fruits of righteousness, because they help us to bear Afflictions with the most quiet and peaceable temper of mind.

For those divine virtues before mentioned which are oftentimes the happy Fruits of our Afflictions, are at the same time our greatest supports under them. Piety teaches us to look

upon them as the necessary and gentle chastisements of a Father's hand, and the effect of his love. Humility lightens them; by laying the soul low, it causes the storm to blow over it; or by a yielding acquiescence stands out the fury of it; so the low and bending reed is safe and unbroken in the midst of those hurricanes that fell the stout and lofty oaks. Patience confirms the heart to bear them, collects its strength, and prepares for the worst. Faith rises the soul above them. Resignation makes us content and satisfied under them. And heavenly-mindedness looks beyond them.

How peaceable and quiet is the suffering soul, when any one of these divine graces hath its proper influence upon it! But how much more so, when they are all in lively exercise, exerting their united force and energy to support it! And I believe we need look no farther than this, and suppose no more than the vigorous efforts and efficacy of all these graces united, strengthened, and exerted to the utmost, by the extraordinary grace and help of God's spirit, to account for the amazing and even miraculous constancy with which the primitive martyrs sustained their greatest torments.

But, O! how contrary to this is the state of that man who is destitute of the support of all these holy dispositions in a day of deep distress; or that is possessed and governed by the contrary! who cannot think of God but with terror; whose heart is still haughty and unsubdued; impatient, fretful, and reluctant under

der the galling yoke; who has no comfortable reflections backward, and none but the darkest prospects forward; whose heart is still rebellious, hard and unrelenting; and still cleaves fast to the world, where all his happiness lay, and which now fails him!

Those graces then which give the holy soul so much peace, stability and comfort under Afflictions, may properly be called the peaceable Fruits of righteousness. As they also may,

2. Because they possess the mind with an habitual peace and serenity afterwards.

They give it steadiness and self-government under those adverse events and ruffling occurrences of life, which transport many into excess of passion, to the disturbance of their own peace and that of others.

Besides, they keep the passions in peace, under the apprehension of future evils; check the extravagant tumults of the imagination, quiet our fears, and dispose us calmly to wait the issue. Those dreadful and distracting fears which tear and harrow the guilty soul under the expectation of a near calamity, find no place in the mind where the Fruits of righteousness appear and flourish. Such is the *perfect peace* of them whose mind is *stayed on the Lord*, Isa. xxv. 13. *Great peace have they, says the Psalmist, that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.* Psalm cxix. 165.

But it may not however be improper to observe here; that the infelicity of a natural temper, and certain disorders in the animal frame,

may sometimes defeat the full influence of the forementioned virtues, and deprive even the pious mind of some degrees of that serenity and peace; which they are proper to inspire. This falls but too often under common notice to need any proof. However, in general, it may safely be affirmed; that when the mind is governed by the forementioned holy principles and dispositions, it will in all cases enjoy a greater peace and stability than it could enjoy without them: and that this peace will always be in proportion to the degree in which those divine graces exert their respective influence.

And this may suffice to shew the reason why the apostle calls them the *peaceable* Fruits of righteousness, agreeably to what the apostle James says, that *the Fruits of righteousness are sown in peace.* James iii. 18.

I proceed now,

III. To consider who they are on whom Afflictions have this happy effect.

The text says, it is upon them *who are exercised thereby.* But this general proposition must undoubtedly be taken with some restriction. For

I. It is most certain that all who are under Afflictions do not receive such benefit by them.

We frequently see the contrary. Wicked men, by their obstinacy and want of thought, often defeat the good effect of providential discipline, which was intended to soften and reclaim them. And Solomon tells us, that *though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him,* Prov. xxvii. 22. Nay, some-

sometimes wicked men grow worse by those very means which make good men better. So the same sun which softens the wax, hardens the clay. Nay,

2. It is not every good man that reaps all those advantages by his Afflictions I before mentioned.

At least, good men do not reap them all in the same degree. Some are but very little mended by them; soon lose the good impressions they felt; which like the *morning cloud* or *early dew*, at the return of the sun, are quickly dispersed and gone. But

3. The meaning is, that the divine discipline has this design and tendency; that Afflictions are in their own nature a proper and powerful expedient to reform the mind and make the heart better; and to procure the greatest spiritual benefit to those *who are exercised thereby*. And

Lastly, That they actually have this effect upon those who take a proper care to improve them.

For they are but means, after all; and operate and take effect the same way that all other means do; that is, by being carefully used, attended to, and improved by us. For the best means, if neglected, or misimproved, will fail of their intended effect. Which fitly introduces the last thing I proposed, which was,

IV. To consider what is necessary on our part to procure these happy Fruits of Afflictions; or in what manner we are to behave, that they may actually yield to us the peace-

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able fruits of righteousness whenever we are exercised thereby.

This now is a matter of considerable concern to us all. Not only because we are continually liable to Afflictions of one kind or another, either personal or relative, temporal or spiritual; but because we see they are intended for our greatest good in this state of discipline and trial; and if they be not improved, they are more than lost; if we be not the better, we shall in all likelihood be the worse for them.

Now in order to secure those happy Fruits of Affliction before mentioned, these three things are necessary, viz.

Serious thought,

Constant watchfulness, and

Fervent prayer.

And these are equally necessary, both whilst our Afflictions are continued, and when they are removed.

I. The first thing necessary on our part in order to improve Affliction is serious thought or deep self-reflection.

And at such a time, provided the intellectual powers be not disordered, the mind is generally best disposed to this employment. If any thing can make us serious and thoughtful, a sore calamity will; especially if the event be hazardous, and we have reason to fear the worst. Then the soul recollects itself, and begins to think in good earnest; is no longer satisfied with vain hopes, wrong lights, and false appearances; but goes to the bottom of things,

things, searches the foundation, takes a wide scope and review of its present temper, and past conduct; and is most anxiously solicitous for some solid bottom to rest upon.

Then the promises of the divine word are precious, and the soul is very desirous to know, whether it may apply them and take the comfort of them or not. This will naturally put it upon a diligent self-research; to see whether it has indeed those characters and qualifications to which those promises are made and limited. For without this it dares not, it cannot extract the least consolation from them: be they ever so refreshing, it cannot come at them, and whenever they are suggested, will be ready to reply in the words of the Samaritan woman to our Saviour, *Alas! I have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; whence then can I come at those living waters?* John iv. 11. Tell him that he must apply them by faith, and he is ready to answer; "If I have not indeed the qualifications of those to whom these promises are made, that faith will be presumption. And in this case to apply the promises, is like healing up the wound that wants to be searched; which makes the case but worse. No; shew me but my sincerity in the midst of all my defects, that the love and fear of God have ruled in my heart, with a real, if but a weak influence; that God is my reconciled Father through the merits and intercession of Christ; let my conscience bring in this testimony, and I am satisfied. Then I can,

"and may, and will take the comfort of the promises; otherwise I cannot." This now, I say, puts the mind upon the most deep and serious self-research; and brings it into the best frame to receive the most solid comfort.

2. A constant watchfulness under our Afflictions is equally necessary to our receiving real good from them.

And the necessity of this arises from the well known inconstancy of our good frames. We should therefore watch over our tempers and dispositions; to keep them even, undisturbed and regular.—For adversity is attended with temptations that are no less apt to deprive us of our self-command, than those of prosperity. And one principal means of getting good by Affliction, is to keep the mind in a proper frame to receive it; by cultivating an habitual contentment, resignation and meekness, and watching against every thing that may tend to excite the contrary dispositions. We carefully watch the several turns and symptoms of our bodily distempers; why should we not as diligently attend to the symptoms and changes in the distempers of our souls, which the former are sometimes sent to cure?

3. Another means to get good by Afflictions is frequent, fervent, and persevering prayer.

That God would help us to preserve a temper of spirit suited to suffering circumstances, and prepare our hearts to receive the good intended by them; that he would please to strengthen, support and encourage us, assist our faith and contemplations, compose and establish

establish our minds, and fit us for the final issue.

These things are necessary on our part, if we would receive real benefit from our troubles.

But on the other hand, if a person remains thoughtless, stupid, and inattentive to the frame of his own spirit, and either wholly neglects the duty of prayer, or performs it in a light, formal, or superficial manner; if thus, I say, he behaves under his Afflictions, how is it likely, how is it possible, his spiritual state should be at all the better for them? No, the Fruits of righteousness will never spring up in so neglected and barren a soil.

And the same serious thought, watchfulness and prayer, are as necessary after Afflictions as they are under them. — Otherwise the mind will soon contract its former obliquity, and bad habits.

When God is pleased to restore to us our wonted comforts and capacities, we should in our most serious minutes, recollect what good we have gained by our Afflictions; what Fruits of righteousness they have produced; what lusts they have mortified; what virtues improved; how we behaved under them; what good impressions we then felt, and whether we still retain them; what good purposes we then formed, and whether we still keep them; and what peculiar obligations we are now under to a stricter walk with God, in the exercise of all the virtues of a pious and holy life; that we may be the better prepared for the next trial we are to meet.

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Constant watchfulness is also no less requisite when we emerge out of deep distress; to put us on our guard against those sins, and all the occasions of those sins which, it may be, then lay with a heavy weight on our conscience; and to excite us to greater diligence in those duties, the too great neglect of which we then sincerely lamented; that we do not *return like a dog to his vomit, or as a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

And fervent prayer is especially necessary that God would be pleased to continue and strengthen the pious purposes we formed, and help us to perform the vows we made to him in the days of our distress. That he would please by his grace to correct the vanity and levity of our hearts, and enable us to think as seriously and as justly in a time of health and prosperity, as we are disposed to do in a time of sickness and adversity.

If we proceed stedfastly in this wise and pious course, we may in time hope, through divine grace to receive all the forementioned Fruits of righteousness, which the divine chastenings are sent to produce. Thus shall we be enabled to extract honey from the gall, gather strength from weakness, convert our sorrows into gladness, and turn apparent evils into real good.

I shall now conclude with a few reflexions on the whole subject.

1. We hence learn that it is a great mistake to think, as some good Christians are ready

dy to do, that all Afflictions are sent in a way of anger, and are tokens of God's displeasure against them.

The contrary to this is true. They are sent out of love. *Whom the Lord loves he chastens*, as it is in verse the sixth before the text. If they are sent as the proper means to increase these peaceable and salutary Fruits of righteousness, how is it in a way of anger? Is it in anger that a parent obliges his child to submit to a nauseous potion or a painful operation for the recovery of its health? Or that a tender father corrects his child for its good? In the former case there is no sign of anger at all; and in the latter, an equal sign of love*.

Never, I believe, did any good Christian see the least reason to regret the severest afflictions he ever met with. Many, I am sure, have been thankful for them all their days, as the greatest blessings they ever received. So exactly does God proportion the degrees of Affliction to the necessity of the case.

Afflictions do a Christian no more harm than persecutions do the church, which always purify, purge and strengthen it. And as an ancient divine expresses it, "God's vines are always the better for bleeding."

* "The kind and chief design of God in all his severest dispensations is, to melt and soften our hearts to such degrees, as he finds necessary, in order to the good purposes of his grace; and so to dispose and prepare them every way as that they may become fit mansions for his holy spirit to dwell in."

Atterbury's Sermons, vol. ii. page 200.

From

From what hath been said upon this subject we may distinctly see what it is to have Afflictions sanctified.

A phrase, I believe, that is much oftener used than understood. For when we pray that Afflictions may be sanctified to us, we mean no more in reality, than that we may be sanctified by them: or that by the grace of God they may become the effectual means of making us more holy; by subduing the bad habits of our mind, and cultivating all the good and pious affections there. So that Afflictions are only then sanctified, when (according to the phrase in the text) they *yield the peaceable Fruits of righteousness*. In order to which, I have just observed, there is much to be done on our part, if we either know what we mean, or are sincere in that prayer. For in vain do we desire that Afflictions may be sanctified, if we do not use our best endeavours that they may be so; that is, that we may become the better for them.

I have really been grieved to see some Christians, who have made a high profession of religion, to lie under the power of a fretful, repining, discontented and impatient spirit, when the hand of God was upon them, using passionate and unbecoming expressions, to the great disturbance of themselves, and all about them; and at the same time crying out, "O that this great Affliction may be sanctified!" when it was apparent, that they either knew not what they meant by that expression (which they

they had taken up from others, and learned by rote) or else were not sincere in what they prayed for. Because at the very same time they indulged that frame of spirit which would absolutely prevent their Afflictions being sanctified, or themselves being the better for them. For Afflictions are then sanctified, and then only, when they increase our love to God, our humility, our patience, our faith, resignation and heavenly-mindedness.

3. What reason have we to adore the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father in laying his children under those afflicting dispensations which are necessary to their true interest.

And he never sends them but when he knows they are so. We may possibly think otherwise, but in our own case we often think amiss. Children are not always competent judges of what is good for them; because they are ignorant of their true interest, and judge only by appearances: and were they to have all they desired, and be excused from every thing they disliked, they would soon be ruined. But our heavenly Father knows our interest better than we do, and therefore chuses for us better than we can; and out of love to us will send us that which he knows to be for our good, whether we think so or not. And much of his goodness and wisdom is seen in the kind, duration, degree and seasonableness of our Afflictions; which will very plainly appear to the mind that attentively considers those several circumstances that attend them.

4. What

4. What hath been said may tend to prepare us to meet the future sufferings of life, and teach us how to bear them.

It may not be long, perhaps, ere some of us are called to put these seasonable instructions into practice. Let us not be over-secure of our present peace: we know not how soon a sudden storm may succeed our calm. In a state so variable as this, things can never continue long in the same posture. The scene will soon shift. It is our wisdom to be in a readiness to meet all changes: to be armed against the worst, and prepared for the best; by cultivating those holy affections of the heart, and that heavenly temper of mind, which will be our best support under the one, and our best preparation for the other; and which alone can fit us for that state of everlasting rest, *where all tears shall be wiped away from the eyes; where there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and where there shall be no more pain.* Rev. xxi. 4.

Lastly, how little reason have we to be very fond of a world so subject to vicissitude, anxiety and sorrow!

Surely, he that is most indifferent to this world makes the wisest estimate of it. But how very wrong are the notions which men in general entertain concerning it! especially they who have drank deep of, and intoxicated themselves with its vanities! — Saith the sensual and covetous man, *It is good for us to be here,* as Peter said on the mount of Transfigu-

4. *ration,*

ration, when *he knew not what he said*. Whereas the truth is, it is not good for us to be here; it would be better for us if we were not here; and it will never be well with us till we are gone hence.

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S E R M O N XVII.

Of Religious Retirement.

Preached before the Queen at St. James's
Chapel, on Friday, March, 23, 1704-5.

By Bishop ATTERBURY.

MATTH. xiv. 23.

*When he had sent the multitude away, he went up
into a mountain, apart, to pray.*

IT hath been disputed, which is a state of greater perfection, the social, or the solitary; whereas, in truth, neither of these estates is complete without the other; as the example of our blessed Lord (the unerring test and measure of perfection) informs us. His life, which ought to be the pattern of ours, was a mixture of contemplation and action, of austerity and freedom: we find him often, where the greatest concourse was, in the market-places, in the synagogues, and at festival entertainments; and we find him also retiring from the croud into a desert,

fert, or a garden, and there employing himself in all kinds of religious exercise, and intercourse with God, in fasting, meditation, and prayer. In imitation of his spotless example, we may, doubtless, lead public lives innocently, and usefully; conversing with men, and doing good to them; mutually sowing, and reaping the several comforts and advantages of human society. But because the pleasures of conversation, when too freely tasted, are intoxicating, and dangerous; because the temptations we there meet with are many and mighty; and even where the *spirit is willing* to resist, yet the *flesh is often weak*; we ought, therefore, to lessen the too great complacency we are apt to have in such satisfactions, by fit intermissions of them; to strengthen ourselves for such public encounters, by our religious privacies; to retire from the world sometimes, and converse with God, and our own consciences; examining the state, and fortifying the powers of our souls, in secrecy and silence: we must do, as our Lord did, *Send the multitudes away, and go up into the mountain, apart, to pray.*

I shall, from these words, take occasion to discourse to you concerning the great (but much neglected) duty of religious retreat and recollection. I shall, first, briefly shew you, under what limitations I would be understood to recommend the duty; and, then, what the advantages are, which arise from a devout and discreet performance of it.

I mean not to press upon you that sort of Retirement, which is so much esteemed and prac-

tised in the church of Rome; where all perfection is reckoned to consist in solitude, and no man is allowed capable of arriving at the height of virtue, who doth not strip himself of all the conveniences of life, and renounce all manner of acquaintance with the world, and the things of it: I see not, wherein this state of life claims the preeminence over all others; how it is founded in nature, and reason; what particular example, precept, or direction there is in the Gospel, inviting us to it. John the Baptist is, indeed, there represented, as sequestering himself from human converse, and spending his time *in the wilderness*, Luke i. 17. but as he is said to have come *in the spirit and power of Elias*, ver. 55. (a spirit far different from the spirit of the Gospel) and did, therefore, professedly imitate that prophet, in his severe manner of life, and look, and diet, and garb, and behaviour, and doctrine; so his example belonged rather to the Mosaic state, under which he lived and taught, than to the Christian dispensation, which began, where his preaching ended. Nor did even the Baptist himself propose his own practice, as a pattern to his followers: on the contrary, when the people, the publicans, and the soldiers enquired of him, *what they should do, to flee from the wrath to come*, he did not exhort them to go out of the world into the wilderness; but gave them such directions only as related to a faithful discharge of their duty in their several stations and callings: and when afterwards our Saviour began to enter on his ministry, and to appear as our Saviour, by
publishing

publishing the Gospel of his kingdom, we find nothing either in his actions, or his doctrine, to countenance that recluse and solitary state, which some since, who would be thought best to have imitated his example, and obeyed his precepts, have so zealously espoused and practised. His divine discourses were chiefly spent in pressing men to exercise those graces which adorn the sociable state: even his first sermon on the mount to the multitude did, in the entrance of it, recommend and enjoin a public, conspicuous, and exemplary virtue; and (with some allusion, perhaps, to that eminence on which he sat, and the company which surrounded him) he then likened his disciples to *a city set on an hill, that cannot be hid; he commanded them to put their light in a candlestick, not under a bushel; and so to make it shine before men, that they seeing their good works, might glorify their Father which is in heaven; Mat. v. 14, 15, 16.*

Far be it from me, however, to condemn all those good and holy persons, who have betaken themselves to this solitary and austere course of living. Doubtless, many of them were acted by a sincere, but misguided, principle of piety; the fruits of which, though mixed with a great allay of superstition, did yet, in divers respects, redound to the credit of religion, and the good of mankind. But supposing these to be real, yet they were, I say, uncommanded instances of virtue; not possible, or, if possible, not fit to be practised by the far greater part of Christians. The retreat there-

fore, which I am speaking of, is not that of monks and hermits, but of men living in the world, and going out of it for a time, in order to return into it; it is a temporary, not a total retreat; such as we may leave off, or resume, at pleasure, according as we have need of it, or an opportunity for it; such, as is consistent with all the business, and even with the innocent pleasures of life; and is so far from interfering with the duties of our public offices and stations, that it disposes and enables us for the better discharge of them. 'Tis this sort of retreat which may properly be made the matter of general exhortation from the pulpit, because it is really matter of general obligation to every good and sincere Christian.

No man is, or ought to be so deeply immersed in the affairs of this world, as not to be able to retire from them now and then into his closet, there to mind the concerns of another. Every day of his life, early, or late, some moments he may and must find to bestow this way; the Lord's day particularly is a great opportunity of this kind, which can never wholly be neglected without indevotion, or even without scandal. And such also is the annual season of recollection in which we are now far advanced; not, I trust, without having employed it, in some measure, to those good purposes for which it was intended. At such times as these, either when the labours and ordinary occupations of life cease, or when public diversions and entertainments are forbidden; then every one, the noble and the mean, the wealthy

thy and the poor, hath it certainly in his power, if it be but in his heart, to retire; to step aside from the hurry and vanities of life, and all the allurements of sense, and to examine, and improve, and enjoy himself in private.

That we may be all excited so to do, I shall proceed, in the next place, to represent to you the several advantages attending this religious practice; whether we consider it, as a means of effacing the ill impressions made on our minds in daily conversation, or as an opportunity of pursuing farther degrees of perfection and abounding in all the methods of spiritual improvement.

The advantages of the first kind, which it affords us, are plainly such as these; That it unites and fixes our scattered thoughts; places us out of the reach of the most dangerous temptations; frees us from the insinuating contagion of ill examples, and hushes and lays asleep those troublesome passions, which are the great disturbers of our repose and happiness.

A dissipation of thought is the natural and unavoidable effect of our conversing much in the world; where we cannot help squandering away a great deal of our time upon useless objects, of no true worth in themselves, and of no real concern to us. We roul on in a circle of vain empty pleasures, and are delivered over continually from one slight amusement to another; ever seemingly very busy, and ever really very idle; applying ourselves without respite to that, which it becomes us most to neglect,

and utterly neglectful of that one thing necessary, which it becomes and behoves us most to pursue. This gives us by degrees such a levity and wantonness of spirit, as refuses admittance to all serious thoughts, and renders us incapable of reflection; makes our closet a terrible place to us, and solitude a burthen. To retrieve ourselves from this vain, uncertain, roving, distracted way of thinking and living, it is requisite to retire frequently, and to converse much with (what we above all things love, and yet above all things hate to converse with) ourselves; to inure our minds to recollection, to fix them on the greatest and most concerning objects, those which religion suggests, and which will, by their importance, deserve, and engage, and command our attention; till the busy swarm of vain images, that besets us, be thoroughly dispersed, and the several scattered rays of thought, by being thus collected together, do by little and little warm our frozen hearts, and at last produce an holy flame.

The expedience of retirement is yet greater, as it removes us out of the way of the most pressing and powerful temptations that are incident to human nature. Ye all know by experience, that these meet us most frequently, and affect us most strongly in society; where our senses, the great inlets of temptation, are most awakened, and tempting objects, by their number and nearness, make the most vivid and lasting impressions upon us. Indeed, there is no place, no state, or scene of life, that hath not its proper and peculiar temptations; even
solitude

solitude itself is not without them: but they are few, and faint, in comparison with those to which our appearance on the great stage of the world exposes us; and whenever they attack us in our recesses, they do, or may find us prepared, and upon our guard; we are then at leisure to encounter them, and have helps near at hand, which, if made use of, will enable us to decline, or baffle them. Whereas, in public, we are merely passive to such impressions; which strike our minds so violently, and succeed each other so fast, that we have no opportunity, no strength, no inclination almost to withstand them.

The great risque which virtue runs in company, is, from the neighbourhood of ill examples, which are of so contagious a nature, that, if we live much amongst them, we shall as surely be corrupted by them, as he, that often breathes in ill air, will at last partake of the infection. 'Tis dangerous for the most innocent person in the world to be too frequently and nearly a witness to the commission of vice and folly. Such views lessen the natural horror we have for such actions; and render the thoughts of them more familiar, and less displeasing to us. Especially, when we are used to see ill things practised by persons, whom we regard; the favourable opinion we have of the doer extends itself to the action done; and leads us insensibly from seeing to approving, and from approving to imitating. And thus being (the very best of us) prone to do evil, and living in the midst of evil; being attacked thus from

without, and betrayed from within we are not capable of making any effectual resistance: the only refuge, we have, is in retreat, where we may at leisure correct the ill impressions that have been made upon us; and, by disuse, and distance, weaken the force of those ill influences, which we could not wholly avoid.

Another advantage which Retirement affords us, is, that it calms and composes all the passions; those especially of the tumultuous kind; which, while the business and pleasures of life possess our hearts, are under a restless and violent agitation. We seldom mix long in conversation, without meeting with some accident that ruffles and disturbs us; somewhat that plays either upon our hopes, or our fears; our aversions, or desires. An injurious, or slighting word is thrown out, which we think ourselves obliged to resent; or some innocent expression of ours is misinterpreted and resented by others, and that provokes a return. Our enemy comes in our way, and kindles thoughts of aversion and hatred in us; we look upon those, who are above us in all the advantages of life, with envious eyes, and with contempt on those who are beneath us. Thus are we delivered over from passion to passion, tossed and disquieted in our minds, during the intercourse we maintain with the world. But when we quit it, and retire, all these winds are presently laid, and there is a perfect calm. The objects, which excite us, being removed, our appetites also languish and die away; we possess our souls in patience and peace, and enjoy a profound tranquillity and

and rest, the pleasure of which is great to those who are so happy as to have a relish for it, and is enhanced by being always tasted with innocence.

Wouldst thou then be free from envy and scorn, from anger and strife? fly from the occasions of them; steal away from the great scene of passion and business into thy privacy, shut the doors about thee, *Commune with thy own heart in thy chamber, and be still*, Ps. iv. 4. There all animosities are forgotten, all pursuits, all competitions cease; there all marks of distinction are laid aside; the great and the lowly, the prince and the subject are upon the level; equally under the eye of one common master, equally desirous of pleasing him, and mindless of lesser interests and concerns. There the vanities and vexations of this world are shut out, and the considerations of another are let in; and our soul enjoys that sweet contentment and repose, which it enjoys no where else, on this side heaven.

I have hitherto considered the usefulness of religious retreat, with respect to some ill impressions made upon us in conversation, which it removes: I shall now consider it, as productive of the chief Christian graces and virtues; in as much as it affords us the best opportunity of knowing God, and ourselves, and of taking all the proper methods to reconcile and approve ourselves to God, which are consequent upon such a knowledge. For, though it be expedient for every rank and order of men, yet is it more particularly advantageous to penitents, to

go up with our Saviour into the mountain, apart, to pray.

'Tis our duty, and our privilege, our chief honour and happiness, to be *acquainted with God*, John xxii. 21. and this acquaintance can never be made, but, where we divest ourselves of all other acquaintance, in our closets. When we have called off our thoughts from worldly pursuits and engagements, then (and not till then) are we at liberty to fix them on the best, the most deserving, and desirable of objects, God; to study his blessed nature and perfections, to imprint a filial awe of him on our hearts, a lively sense of his perpetual inspection and presence; to abound in all the methods of devout application to him, in acts of petition and praise, of joy and wonder, of submission and hope, of love and affiance; to open all our wants, and impart all our griefs to him, and to express in the most significant manner, we are able, our entire and unlimited dependance upon him; till, by often dwelling on such thoughts and reflections as these, we have made them familiar, habitual, and natural to us; and can have as easy and delightful a recourse to God, in all accidents, and upon all occasions, as a son hath to a beloved and loving parent, who, he knows, is at all times able to assist, and ready to receive him: in a word, till we can look up to God in each step of our conduct, as the supreme end and guide of all our actions, the fixed centre of all our wishes, desires and designs; till we bring ourselves to love nothing in competition with him,

him, nothing but in order to the enjoyment of him; and resolve to do nothing, and be nothing, but what we are sure will please him.

Can any thing refine, raise, or ennoble our natures more than such a conversation as this, which is thus begun, improved, and perfected in solitude? Shall we not think it worth our while, to cease for a time from cultivating useless and perishing friendships with men, that we may be the more at leisure, and the better qualified, to enter into this divine correspondence, which is of the vastest concern to us, and upon which our everlasting welfare depends?

While indeed our hearts are deeply engaged in the concerns of this world, we cannot well relish the pleasures of such a spiritual commerce: but, after we have once accustomed and inured ourselves to it, we shall find it the most delightful entertainment of the mind of man, pleasing as light to the eyes, *sweeter than honey and the honey-comb*. Sensual men may make sport with such a pretence, and call it enthusiasm, and the product of an heated imagination; but they, that taste the satisfaction, know it to be real, and would not part with it for all the delights this world can afford; and which (in the disparaging phrase of the apostle) they *count but as dung*, in comparison of *the excellency of this knowledge of God, and Christ Jesus*.

As a religious retirement is a great means of advancing us in the knowledge of God, so doth it assist us towards attaining a true knowledge

ledge of ourselves; towards searching and trying all our ways, and getting a right information concerning the state of our consciences. He that will thrive in his temporal affairs, must often balance his accounts, examine his gains; and his losses, and see what proportion they bear to each other; consider, where his conduct may have been faulty in any respect, and how for the future to rectify it. The same vigilance and care is requisite in relation to our spiritual concerns also; and we can never exert it effectually but in the closet, where privacy and silence befriend our enquiries. When the importunity of outward objects ceases, when the noise and avocations of a troublesome world are at a distance, we may enter upon these searches without difficulty, and finish them without interruption. We may then look inwards, and take a distinct view of what at other times passes there unobserved; of our hidden inclinations and aversions, of the springs which secretly move us in all our pursuits, of the temptations that beset us hardest, and most frequently foil us, of the ground that we have lost, or got, in our several encounters. And when we are advanced thus far in the knowledge of ourselves, and of our ruling sins and infirmities, we have taken the most useful and necessary step towards abounding in the three great duties of the penitent, contrition, resolution, and prayer.

Contrition is an holy grief, excited by a lively sense, not only of the punishment due to our guilt, (that the schools call attrition) but likewise of the infinite goodness of God, against which

which we have offended ; accompanied with a detestation of our sin, and of ourselves, for the sake of it. At this act of the mind repentance (properly speaking) begins ; and this godly concern of heart is rarely attained, to be sure, it can never be duly exerted, and improved, but in private. And, therefore, in the story of St. Peter we may observe that, as soon as a conviction of his guilt had seized him, it is said, that *he went out, and wept bitterly*, Mat. xxvi. 75. he withdrew into a secret place, where he might mourn his own fall with freedom ; where he might feed, and raise up to a due height the inward anguish he felt, and indulge himself in all the expressions of sincere sorrow. The wounds of conscience, like other wounds, though generally received in public, must always be healed in private : there they may be laid open and searched to the bottom, there the raging smart of them is best endured, and there suitable remedies are most easily, and most usefully applied ; where leisure, and rest, silence and a proper discipline assist the patient, and promote the cure.

The next step to contrition is, resolution, or a firm immutable purpose of heart, never more to allow ourselves in that transgression, which we now abominate and deplore. And, in order to the forming such a well-weighed and stable resolution, there must be a calm and clear foresight of the difficulties which may attend the execution of it, and a just computation of our own strength to bear up against them ; we must deliberately consider, under what circumstances the

the temptation, against which we are now arming ourselves, hath beset us hardest, and how, for the future, we may best decline them; what helps and supports we have by experience found most useful, and how, in the day of trial, we may be secure of them; to what a broken dispirited state of mind we have already reduced ourselves, by so often and lightly departing from what we had purposed; and, with how much greater difficulty, every time that we give way, we recover our ground. I need not prove to you, that these, and the like reflections, which are necessary towards our resolving well and wisely, can never be dwelt on, in all their due compass and force, but at leisure, and in sacred Retirement. Doubtless, the good Psalmist had been some time in his closet, and on his knees, when he uttered those emphatical words; *I have sworn, and am steadfastly purposed, to keep thy righteous judgments.* Psal. cxix. 100.

But of all the duties of the penitent, that which privacy best qualifies us for, is prayer; which it enables us to perform in such a manner, as is likely to be most prevalent and effectual. Great indeed is the excellence and advantage of public devotions, as they testify our common reverence of the Divine Being, as they are best fitted to implore, or to acknowledge public blessings, and as they excite a public emulation in the breasts of sincere worshippers. However, in some respects, they must yield the pre-eminence to closet-prayer; particularly in this, that they are not so well calculated, as that, to procure ease and repose of conscience to the sinner,

ner, and to adjust particular accounts between God and our souls. For it is of special use to this purpose, in these three respects; as it affords us the best opportunity of being fixed, fervent, and circumstantial in our addresses to God.

In the solemn service of the sanctuary, let us endeavour never so much to prevent distractions, we shall now and then be sensible of them: outward objects will break in upon our senses, and divert the application of our minds: even the length of the office, and the daily return of the same forms, will, to persons not rightly qualified and disposed, occasion spiritual languors and wandrings. And this is not the case only of stated forms; the same inconvenience doth, in a much higher degree, belong to unpremeditated prayer; the hearers of which must first judge of the fitness, both of the matter and the expression, before they can reasonably join in what they hear. And thus the novelty of the phrase, instead of fixing, breaks and divides the attention of a sincere worshipper; his curiosity indeed may be awakened by this means, but his devotion is certainly checked and suspended. Now these obstacles are all removed, these inconveniences are prevented, when we pray in private. We are then placed immediately under the eye of God, which awes us; but under no other eyes, and in the neighbourhood of no other objects, which might divert or discompose us: we are at liberty to employ that part of our time in the performance of this service, when we find ourselves best disposed

ed for it; to make choice of our own thoughts; and our own words; such, as are best suited to our present necessities, and desires: and what is thus passing within ourselves, we cannot but perceive, and attend to. We may break off from the duty, whenever we find our attention flags; and return to it at a more seasonable opportunity.

Nor are we capable, at such times, of being more fixed only, but likewise more fervent and inflamed. True religion is ever modest and reserved in its demeanor, when it appears in publick; jealous of doing any thing that may favour of vanity and ostentation; unwilling to allow itself in any such earnestness of speech, or singularity of behaviour, as may call off the eyes and ears of others to observe them: it contents itself, for the most part, with a composed and serious look, with a simple and unaffected carriage. But when publick regards and restraints are taken off, the pious soul may then let itself loose into the highest fervors of zeal, into the freest raptures of thought, and into a suitable vehemence, and warmth of expression: there is no sort of holy address, which it is not then allowed to make use of; no outward signs of devotion and reverence, which it may not decently abound in.

There is yet another great advantage that attends our private devotions; they give us leave to be as express and particular as we please in our representations. In the church, the sinner and the saint, men of all ranks, distinctions, and attainments in virtue, must join in the same common

common forms: and though each of them may, by a sudden glance of mind, adapt the general words to his own circumstances; yet one branch of the service presses too fast upon another, to admit of any pause between them. And they, therefore, who lie under the load of any particular guilt, rise not from their knees with so much comfort, as they would have done, had they been at liberty to dwell upon it, and confess it in all its aggravations. This liberty their closet, and that alone, can afford them. There they may expatiate as much as they please upon their wants and unworthiness: there they may pour out all their complaints to God, and lay open all their griefs and fears, and send up all their thanks and acknowledgments: there importunities are not forbidden, repetitions are not unbecoming; but they may persist knocking till it is opened to them, and asking till they have obtained.

These are some of the many spiritual advantages, which the present hours of holy recollection, when well employed, will be sure to afford us. And God grant, that all of us may, as we have opportunity and leisure, so employ them!

Indeed, the greater our sphere of public action is, the less time we can allow ourselves to spend in these religious exercises; but still some of it is due to them, nor can any secular cares, or avocations whatsoever, wholly excuse us from paying it. Our blessed Lord, we are sure, had very great business to transact with mankind, and a very short time in which to finish

S E R M O N XVIII.

A Scorner incapable of true Wisdom.

Preached before the Queen at *White-Hall*,

October 28, 1694.

By Bishop ATTERBURY.

PROV. xiv. 6.

A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.

IT is the wisest among the children of men, who speaks; and about that, which most nearly concerns us; and he best understood even the method of attaining true wisdom: it becomes us, therefore, to give the most fixed and serious attention, we can, to what he is saying.

A scorner, saith he, seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not. Where we are, first, to enquire, who it is, that is represented to us, under the character of a scorner; and, then, in what sense he is said to seek wisdom, but not to find it.

The *scornor* is one, who is frequently mentioned in this book of Proverbs; and against whom the author of it hath levelled no small number of his apophthegms, and wise sayings. We find in the Psalms and prophetic writings also, many glances at him, many complaints of him; so that the nation of the Jews did, it seems, abound mightily with this sort of men; and they were a great and particular grievance to the followers of true piety and wisdom.

Their character seems, in short, to have been this. They were men, that, with much ado, had made a shift to get rid of good principles, and such stiff opinions, as they found inconsistent with a loose practice. As they had not any religion themselves, so their way was to despise those who had; to look down with pity and contempt upon a poor deluded under-world; beasts of burthen that followed in a track, after their leaders; slaves to received rules, and precarious opinions, to foolish empty forms and observances; but who never once reasoned freely, or thought for themselves. They were unfortunately fallen into a time, when frequent commotions happened in the Jewish state (as the case remarkably was, in the age before Solomon came to the throne) and had seen several sorts of men uppermost, and, consequently, several notions of things prevailing by turns. This contributed mightily to unsettle their thoughts, or (as they called it doubtful) to enlarge them; to create in them a slight opinion of the eternal differences of right and wrong, good and evil; and to make them laugh
at

at those, who were eager on any side, or for any cause whatsoever, which they did not get by.

They evidently saw that some, who sat up for greater purity, and a demurer shew and face of religion than their neighbours, were really counterfeit, and meant nothing, at the bottom, but their own interest. And they wisely resolved, upon this, that all religion was, like theirs, a convenient trick and pretence only; invented by cunning men to keep silly people in awe, to make princes reign safely, and the priesthood live easily. But as for them, they knew better things than to fall in with the herd, and to give themselves up to be ridden by the tribe of Levi; the poorest and most contemptible tribe of the twelve, which had no lot, no inheritance among their brethren; but lived upon the cheat of sacrifices and offerings, and upon driving a gainful traffick for the good things of this world; here paid down to them, by promising and preaching up to those they dealt with, a recompence in a world to come.

Nor were these men content to enjoy this secret, which they had thus found out, quietly among themselves; but set up openly for profelytes, and a party; for running down all religion, and for laughing piety and virtue out of countenance: so that a good and honest man was sure to be their mark, wheresoever they found him; and they were ever shooting their arrows against him, even bitter words, Psal. lxiv. 3. And this was come to that pass, that the true servants of God did almost sink under the affliction; and did make it matter of public request

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request to God in the solemn service of the church, to be freed from it: — *Have mercy upon us, O Lord, said they, have mercy upon us, for we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.* Psal. cxiii. 3, 4.

This is, in some measure, the character of that man, who, in the language of the text, is called a *scornor*; and you see now, in what sense he is said to *seek wisdom*, but *not to find it*. For the meaning of these expressions is plainly this; that he pretends to know more, and to see farther, than the rest of mankind; to have made freer enquiries after truth, and to have shaken off the prejudices of education more thoroughly: he sets up for examining things to the bottom, without taking them upon trust, or relying on the authority of any man. What God is pretended to have said in the holy writings, what wise and good men have said in all ages, and countries of the world, he is not much concerned to know. To the *oracles of right reason* he goes, (by right reason always meaning his own) and from thence he enquires what he is to think, and to do; raises some fanciful scheme of things to himself, frames some particular set of opinions; and then rejoices in the mighty discovery he hath made, and wonders at the rest of the world, that they do not fall in with it, and adore it. Now these pretences, the wise-man tells us, are vain, and these searches are vain; he hath taken a great deal of pains, only to be out of the way, and to miss the mark which

which he aims at: *A scornner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.*

Having thus largely opened the sense of the text, I shall endeavour, in what follows, to justify the truth of the observation contained in it, by shewing you, how it comes to pass, that the men, who thus set up for a more than ordinary pitch of wisdom and sense, by contemning religion, and deriding the professors of it, do always, and must always, fail of the end which they propose to themselves; since, whatever abilities they may have in other matters, yet they are the most unqualified and incapable, of all men, to make impartial enquiries after divine truth, and to discern between that and error.

There are four things, which particularly unfit a man for such a task, a very proud, or a very suspicious temper; false wit, or sensuality. And these are the chief and prevailing ingredients in the composition of that man, whom we call a *scornner*. The two last do generally, and in most instances, belong to him: but the two first are essential to him, and inseparable from him.

Pride is that ruling quality which, of all others, seems to take the fastest hold of him; *Proud and baughty Scornner is his name*, says Solomon elsewhere, Prov. xxi. 24. And again, *There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eye-lids lifted up!* Prov. xxx. 13. The truth is, there never was, nor ever can be a settled contempt of religious principles, that is not built upon pride, i. e. upon an undue value, which a man hath for himself, and for his own opinion, and a disregard for every thing besides: and,

therefore, the author of (that fantastical book) the Leviathan, doth, at the very entrance of it, very honestly, and in terms confess, that he is a man who "loves his own opinions." And so, doubtless, doth every man too, who treads in his steps, though he doth not own it so frankly, or perhaps know it so thoroughly. Indeed a modest humble man can hardly bring himself once to think of shaking off common received principles, and going against the united wisdom of mankind; or, if he should entertain, yet will he never venture to publish that thought; but will conceal it, as carefully as he would his own boiorn infirmity, or the secret of his friend. 'Tis the presumptuous and proud man alone, who dares to trample on those truths, which the rest of the world reverence; and can sit down quietly in the assurance, that he alone is in the right, and all mankind beside in the wrong.

Now, I say, as there is no one quality, that sticks more closely to a Scornor than that of pride, so there is none that doth more evidently obstruct right reasoning, and an impartial search after truths of all kinds, especially those which relate to virtue and piety. And no wonder therefore, if on this account the Scornor, though he *seek wisdom, yet findeth it not*. Pride makes a man seem sufficient in his own eyes, for all manner of speculations and enquiries; and, therefore, puts him indifferently upon the pursuit of all knowledge, and the determination of all doubts, without giving him leave to distrust himself in the least, or once to consider,

sider, which way his genius and abilities lie. Hence it happens, that the man, not being duly qualified for every search, or, if he were, yet not having leisure and opportunity enough to go through with it, is fain to take up with slight and superficial accounts of things; and then, what he wants in true knowledge, to make up in down-right assurance. As soon as he hath touched on any science, or study, he immediately seems to himself to have mastered it; is as positive in his opinions, and as hardy in his assertions, as if the thoughts of his whole life had been directed that way only: which is, as if a coaster, who had gone from port to port only, should pretend to give a better description of the inland parts of a country, than those who have travelled it all over. But this, I say, is the mischievous nature of pride; it makes a man grasp at every thing, and, by consequence, comprehend nothing effectually and thoroughly; and yet (which is worst of all) inclines him to despise and contradict those that do. It gives him just enough understanding, to raise an objection or a doubt; but not enough to lay it: which, as it is the meanest and most despicable, so it is also the most dangerous state of mind a man can be in; and by so much the more dangerous, as the subject, upon which his enquiries turn, is more important, and the errors more fatal which he runs into, for want of a due knowledge of it. He that is but half a philosopher, is in danger of being an atheist; an half-physician is apt to turn empiric; an half-bred man is conceited in his address, and
trouble-

troublesome in his conversation. Thus it is in all matters of speculation, or practice; he that knows but a little of them, and is very confident of his own strength, is more out of the way of true knowledge, than if he knew nothing at all. Now there is, I say, a natural tendency in pride, towards putting a man's mind into such a situation as this; and, therefore, it must needs be a quality very opposite to the search and attainment of true wisdom.

And then, supposing a proud man to be once in the wrong, it is scarce possible that he should ever be set right again; he is placed above the reach of that great means of amendment, reproof; *a scorner beareth not rebuke*, says Solomon, Prov. xiii. 1. And, therefore, as his pride led him into a mistake at first, so will it be sure to keep him there; and to harden him in his way, against whatever wise men can think, or say of him.

Thus, I say, is pride an enemy to the knowledge of truth in general; but most of all doth it hinder men from discerning sacred truth, and the doctrines of revealed religion. A proud man is very hardly brought to digest the humble duties of the cross, or to admit a belief of the mysteries of Christianity: the one are too low for him, and he cannot stoop to the practice of them; the other are too high for his understanding, and he desires to be excused from entertaining any proposition as true, which he doth not perfectly comprehend. If he cannot give himself a certain plain account, in what manner, and to what end God did a thing, he

wisely

wisely resolves, that therefore he did it not at all. If he hath not as clear an idea of every term in an article of faith, as he hath of those in a mathematical proposition; 'tis presently unphilosophical, absurd, and foolish; invented by those, whose interest it is to puzzle mens understandings, that they may have their wills and affections at their service.

II. And this puts us in mind also of that second great ingredient in the character of a scornor, which we propos'd to consider; a strange and unreasonable degree of suspicion, by which he doubts of every thing he hears, and distrusts every man he converses with; imagines the world to be all cheat and imposture; that there is no sincerity, no honesty any where; but that every man is continually studying how to put a trick upon his neighbour. Without this temper (it might be easily proved, that) a man cannot bring himself to run down religion, and the professors of it; and, with it, it is impossible, I think, to arrive at true wisdom. Indeed, to be cautious, and upon our guard, in receiving doctrines, and not easily to give up our assent to every tale that is told us, is a point of great prudence, and very requisite, in such a multiplicity of opinions as there is in the world, to preserve us from error. But then, we may carry this point too far; we may be so scrupulous and circumspect in admitting the testimonies of men, as to reject some good witnesses among several bad ones; and to deceive ourselves oftentimes, for very fear of being deceived by others. A general undistinguished suspicion is altogether as

apt

apt to mislead a man, as a too easy and unwary credulity. And to this excess a Scornor is naturally inclined: he is so possessed with the notion of priestcraft, and pious frauds, as to apply it indifferently to all religions, and to every thing in religion: he is so afraid of having his understanding imposed upon, in matters of faith, that he stands equally aloof from all propositions of that kind, whether true or false: which is, as if a man should refuse to receive any money at all, because there is a great deal goes about that is false and counterfeit; or resolve not to make a friendship or acquaintance with any man, because many men are not to be trusted. Certainly this is a very great instance of folly; and, in what breast soever it harbours, cannot but indispose a man extremely for the study and attainment of religious wisdom. An extremity of suspicion in an enquirer after truth, is like a raging jealousy in an husband, or a friend; it leads a man to turn all his thoughts toward the ill-natured side, and to put the worst construction upon every thing; and (in consequence of that) for once that he is really in the right, in his guesses and censures, to be very often, and very much in the wrong.

III. A third part of the character of that man whom we are describing, is, false wit; or a way of exposing things sacred and serious, by passing a bold jest upon them, and ridiculing arguments, instead of confuting them. The very name of *a scornor* will tell us, that this is one of his most beloved accomplishments: and, I am sure, it is such an one, as can never help a man

man to procure right impressions of things, and will scarce ever allow him to improve or preserve them. Wit indeed, as it implies a certain uncommon reach and vivacity of thought, is an excellent talent; very fit to be employed in the search of truth, and very capable of assisting us to discern and embrace it: but in the way in which the Scorners exerts it, the way of satire and prophane drollery, it betrays a man into a thousand errors, for one that it discovers to him. Men of quick and lively parts are apt to give themselves a loose beyond plain reason and common sense, and to say many things not exactly right and true, in order to say somewhat new and surprizing. Their great aim is, in general, to please; and, in order to it, they must bend all their wit that way, to which the corrupt nature of man is inclined, and be sure always to speak against that which is uppermost; I mean the opinions that are most general and prevailing. This gives them a light and trifling, instead of a serious and manly frame of spirit; and makes them think, they have answered all the wisest reasons that can be brought for any thing, if they have but clapped a nickname upon it, and dressed up a grave and venerable truth in so odd a disguise as to raise mirth and laughter from it. Thus a late person, eminent for wit and wickedness, till a death-bed made him more serious, and gave him truer apprehensions of things, used to please himself mightily with this thought, that the doing of a miracle was only another phrase for the shewing of a trick: and having once represented the thing to himself

self under such a light image, he could hardly be brought to think reverently of it ever afterwards; or to allow the strongest arguments which could be brought for the truth of miracles, a due and impartial consideration. And thus also the great leader of the libertines of this age (whom we have already had occasion to mention) made sport with the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, by translating, after an absurd manner, the Greek word *Λόγος*, (which St. John applies to him) and assuring us, that that appellation given to our Saviour, was, in our tongue, as much as to say, the *verb of God*. And this vain and blasphemous criticism he thought sufficient to overthrow a prime article of the Christian faith. In the same manner he pretended to ridicule the doctrine of grace, by enquiring into the meaning of two words, generally used by divines concerning it, to wit, infusion and inspiration; and by informing us, that they signified, in plain English, Inpowering and Inblowing. I bring these instances to shew, how far a Scornor may be led out of the way of truth, by a little knack of playing upon things and words, which he miscalls wit; and upon which he shall value himself more, and be wiser in his own conceit than *seven men that can render a reason*.

The fourth and last thing, from whence we proposed to give an account of his deceptions, was sensuality: and whether this too doth not, for the most part, accompany a contempt of religion, I appeal to the observation and experience of every one that hears me. Look round the

the world, and you shall seldom find a man loose in his principles, who is not so likewise in manners. There may possibly be, now and then in an age, an instance of some cold phlegmatic man that shall set up for overturning religion and morality, merely for the sake of contradiction, or to get himself a name by it, without the design of indulging his own appetites in so doing: but this is a very rare case; generally the Scorners are, as St. Peter and St. Jude have in their several epistles agreed to describe them, *Men, who walk after their own lusts*, 2 Pet. iii. 3. Jude 13. Accordingly, we may observe, that this scorning humour hath been most prevalent in those ages of the world, in which the love of pleasure, and the arts of ease and luxury did most abound; and is commonly incident to men, at that time of their lives, when their lusts are most ungoverned, and their blood boils hottest. 'Tis chiefly the young robust sinner that indulges himself in it, whilst he is in the midst of his enjoyments: for though a man may continue in the practice of this impious folly to the very end of his life, yet the habit itself is generally formed much earlier.

Now the sensual man is, of all men living, the most improper for enquiries after truth, and the least at leisure for it. He is never sedate and cool; and therefore, not able to fix his attention to a point, and go through with it. He is never disinterested and impartial; and, therefore, not capable of deliberating freely. He is already under the dominion and power of his own lusts; and perhaps likes to be so, and is

very unwilling to shake off his chains. Now such a man, so qualified, is, no doubt, a very incompetent judge of divine truth, and very unfit to consider the pleas that are brought for it. His search into these things is like to be with no great evenness and fairness: how can it, when he comes with strong wishes, that he may find it all a mistake? Indeed, when a man allows himself in all sorts of impurities, and is determined to go on in them; and yet finds himself under the troublesome restraint of principles, and the dread of religion, which hangs continually over him; the only way for him to pursue his enjoyments, and yet be easy, is, to set his face directly against the doctrines of religion, that give him any check or disturbance, and resolve to get rid of them as soon as he can. And he may put the thoughts, which arise in him upon this occasion, together, and make a book of them, if he pleases; and then tell us, that this is a sober enquiry after truth, and a free discussion of the point in debate; but there is nothing of that in it: he thinks of truth, just as a man doth of his enemy, with spite and anger, and a design only of finding out whatever may blast and expose it. This is a strange contumelious way of treating divine things, and would tempt even a good man to return the affronts done to virtue and piety, by opening the characters of those who do them; in which we should commonly find, that sensuality and looseness of life had a very great and particular share. But some men, who write pretended Histories of Religion,
are

are beholden to the real religion of others, that their histories are not written.

Thus have I run through those four several properties, which remarkably belong to the character of a *scornor*; and shewn you, how each of them contributes to misinform and mislead him in his pursuit of wisdom; so that, supposing him really and in good earnest to seek it, yet, thus setting out, and thus qualified, it is not at all probable that he should find it.

And now the plain and obvious use we are to make of this discourse, is, to satisfy ourselves from hence, how it hath come to pass, that the true religion, all along, in the several ages of the world, hath not been entertained by many of the seemingly wittiest and wisest among the children of men. To this startling question we can now give a short and easy answer, from the observation of the text, *they were scornors*. They were either proud and opinionative men, that could not endure to learn plain humble lessons of piety and goodness, especially from such as they had no esteem of, no value for: or their minds were tainted with an ill-natured and unreasonable suspicion, which, from finding out some cheats in religion, led them to pronounce all religion a cheat. They had a talent, perhaps, at ridiculing honest rules and maxims, and making sport with things sacred and serious; and, therefore, to have owned any fixed scheme of religious principles, would have been a mighty damp to their imaginations, and have taken away from them the subject of above half their

wit and pleasantness. Or, lastly, they were men of sensual and impure lives, who were resolved to make their opinions and their pleasures as consistent as they could; and who therefore, were obliged, in point of interest, to disbelieve every thing that made against them.

This is the short and true account of the matter; and will appear to be so, if we cast our eyes backward on the story of the world, and consider, who they have been, that have rejected the true religion, all along from the creation down to this time.

In the old world, Noah, who was the only man that preserved the worship of the true God in his family, seems to have been an honest plain-hearted man; *just and perfect in his generation*, (as he is described in Scripture) and *walking with God*, Gen. vi. 9. The rest of the world are said to have *eaten and drunken, to have married and been given in marriage*, i. e. they were men, who lived in all the enjoyments of sense, who revelled, and took their fill of all the good things of this world; and, to be sure, were very merry, and very bitter upon those that did not. How did they deride that grave preacher of righteousness, and his precise family, when he and his sons talked to them of righteousness, temperance, and judgment! especially, when he told them that there was such a flood coming, and that he was building that ark to preserve himself and his household, what a jest was he to the men of parts and pleasure! How many scornful and gay things were said upon this occasion, while the

the work went forward, by those, who thought themselves very wise, and him very foolish! But the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven opened; and then they began to change their opinions, when (alas) it was too late to learn.

In the next great period after the flood, the true religion was confined to the single nation of the Jews: and one may think it strange at first sight, that, if it were the true religion, it should be so confined; that the wise and knowing part of mankind should not discern the strength of the evidence that was brought for the divine original of the law of Moses, nor receive the God of Israel for their God. But, if we consider a little farther, we shall be satisfied, that the true reason of mens infidelity, throughout this long period of time, was, a mean and contemptuous notion they had entertained of the Jewish people, and of their rites and ceremonies. The wise men of the east, in the earliest ages, and the philosophers of the west, in later times, had too high an opinion of themselves, and too low an one of that little, narrow-souled superstitious nation, to submit themselves to be taught by them. The Jews were a proverb and a by-word to the rest of the world, the perpetual subject of their scorn and reproach: And who can think (may we suppose one of those wise heathens to have said) that truth should lie hid among such an odd sort of people, in such a little spot of the world?

And thus, again, when Christianity first appeared, it made no great progress among the

disputers of this world, among the men of wit and subtlety, for this very reason; because they were Scorners. The gospel was to the Jews (to the most learned and proud sect among the Jews, the Pharisees) a *stumbling-block*; and to those of higher repute among the Greeks, *foolishness*, 1 Cor. i. 23. The great pretenders to knowledge every where unanimously contemned and derided it, as a poor and low system of principles; and could never once think of humbling their minds, to entertain the simplicity of the Gospel.

How should the great lords of the earth, who swarm in all the delights of sense, and thought themselves born to enjoy them, submit to be talked out of their pleasures and their privileges by a few ignorant fishermen, and tent-makers? The story of the propagation of the Gospel in Jewry, might perhaps make a part of the conversation in the court of Tiberius; it was, probably, such a subject of discourse to them, as the Quietists in Italy were to us, at their first appearing. The novelty of the thing might occasion some reflections, and enquiries: but it was not to be expected, that men of pleasure and parts should give themselves the trouble of examining nicely into the pretensions with which this new religion set up, or of considering, in good earnest, whether they ought to become proselytes to it.

We are not to wonder, therefore, if, in some ages after Christianity, we find not much said to the advantage of it, in the writings of those eminent Greeks and Romans, who are allowed

to have been the best masters of polite thought and expression. Alas! Porphyry must have been contented to confess the vanity of philosophy, and Lucian must in great measure have foregone his skill in satyr; the witty libertines of those times must have parted with much of the esteem they had, and with most of their pleasures, if they had once admitted the truth of Christianity: and, therefore, they agreed in running down the reputation of that, lest they should lose their own.

And, as it was immediately after our Saviour's coming, so hath it been ever since, to this very day. The doctrines of the cross have never in any age met, nor will they ever in any future age meet with a kind and hearty reception, among those, who *sit in the seat of the scornors.*

But let us not therefore be dejected, because there are many whom the world esteems, who yet esteem not us, and our holy and undefiled religion! Neither let us suspect ourselves, as being out of the way and imposed upon, because men of a greater reach perhaps, and of a more improved understanding than we, are not of our mind. Solomon, who was certainly a man of understanding, and who was of our mind, doth, in a very few words (which I cannot repeat too often) afford us a full and comfortable solution of the case; *A scornor (saith he) seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.*

From the account of former times it appears to us, that thus it always hath been; and from reflections on the nature of man, that thus it

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necessarily must be; and, therefore, let us possess our souls in patience and peace; and go on in the plain paths of godliness and honesty, without turning to the right, or to the left, for whatever men scornfully witty can say of us, or to us.

Let us beg of him, *who scorneth the scorn-ers, but giveth grace unto the lowly*, Prov. iii. 34. let us beg of him to bestow on us, to preserve, and increase in us that serious and humble frame of spirit, which alone can qualify us for a right apprehension of the truths and mysteries of the Gospel; and which is, therefore, certainly preferable to all other endowments of mind, however the world may have misplaced the greatest part of its esteem upon them.

And let us, in order to this end, frequently take to ourselves the humble words of the Son of Syrach, and say, *O Lord, Father and God of my life, give me not a proud look; but turn away from thy servant always an haughty mind! Turn away from me vain hopes and concupiscence, and thou shalt hold him up that is desirous always to serve thee! Let not the greediness of the belly, nor lust of the flesh take hold of me; and give not over me thy servant to an impudent mind!* Ecclus. xxiii. 4, 5, 6.

And as for those who contemn us, and our narrow principles, and who make us their derision daily, let us (in the words of the apostle) not cease to make mention of them in our prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
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the Father of glory, may give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation to the acknowledgment of him: The eyes of their understanding being enlightned, that they may know, what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. Eph. i. 16, 17, 18.

S E R M O N XIX.

The case of Elijah and the Widow of
Zerephath considered.

A CHARITY SERMON.

By the Rev. Mr. STERNE.

I KINGS xvii. 16.

*And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did
the cruse of oil fail, according to the word
of the Lord which he spake by the prophet
Elijah.*

THE words of the text are the record of
a miracle wrought in behalf of the wi-
dow of Zerephath, who had charitably taken
Elijah under her roof, and administred unto
him in a time of great scarcity and distress.
There is something very interesting and affec-
tionate in the manner this story is related in
holy writ; and as it concludes with a second
still

still more remarkable proof of God's favour to the same person, in the restoration of her dead son to life, one cannot but consider both miracles as rewards of that act of piety, wrought by infinite power, and left upon record in Scripture, not meerly as testimonies of the prophet's divine mission, but likewise as two encouraging instances of God Almighty's blessing upon works of charity and benevolence.

In this view I have made choice of this piece of sacred story, which I shall beg leave to make use of as the ground-work for an exhortation to Charity in general: and that it may better answer the particular purpose of this solemnity, I will endeavour to enlarge upon it with such reflections, as, I trust in God, will excite some sentiments of compassion which may be profitable to so pious a design.

Elijah had fled from two dreadful evils, the approach of a famine, and the persecution of Ahab an enraged enemy: and in obedience to the command of God had hid himself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. In this safe and peaceful solitude, blessed with daily marks of God's providence, the holy man dwelt free both from the cares and glories of the world: by miraculous impulse *the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook*; till by continuance of drought, (the windows of heaven being shut up in those days for three years and six months, which was the natural cause likewise of the famine) it came to pass after a while that the brook, the great fountain

tain of his support, dried up; and he is again directed by the word of the Lord where to betake himself for shelter. He is commanded to arise and go to Zerephath, which belonged to Zidon, with an assurance that he had disposed the heart of a widow-woman there to sustain him. The prophet follows the call of his God: — the same hand which brought him to the gate of the city, had led also the poor widow out of her doors, oppressed with sorrow. She had come forth upon a melancholy errand, to make preparation to eat her last meal, and share it with her child.

No doubt, she had long fenced against this tragical event with all the thrifty management which self-preservation and parental love could inspire; full, no doubt, of cares and many tender apprehensions lest her tender stock should fail them before the return of plenty.

But as she was a widow, having lost the only faithful friend, who would best have assisted her in this virtuous struggle, the present necessity of the times at length overcame her; and she was just falling down an easy prey to it, when Elijah came to the place where she was. *And he called unto her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called unto her and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and behold I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my*

my son, that we may eat it and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not, but go, and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.

True Charity is always unwilling to find excuses——else here was a fair opportunity of pleading many: she might have insisted over again upon her situation, which necessarily tied up her hands;——she might have urged the unreasonableness of the request;——that she was reduced to the lowest extremity already;——and that it was contrary to justice, and the first law of nature, to rob herself and child of their last morsel, and give it to a stranger.

But in generous spirits, compassion is sometimes more than a balance for self-preservation. For, as God certainly interwove that friendly softness in our nature to be a check upon too great a propensity towards self-love——so it seemed to operate here.——For it is observable, that though the prophet backed his request with the promise of an immediate recompence in multiplying her stock; yet it is not evident, she was influenced at all by that temptation. For if she had, doubtless it must have wrought such a mixture of self-interest into the motive of her compliance, as must greatly have allayed the merit of the action.

But this, I say, does not appear, but rather the contrary, from the reflection she makes upon the whole in the last verse of the chapter. *Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.*

Besides, as she was an inhabitant of Zerephath, (or, as it is called by St. Luke, Sarepta, subject to Sidon the metropolis of Phœnicia, without the bounds of God's people) she had been brought up in gross darkness and idolatry, in utter ignorance of the Lord God of Israel: or, if she had heard of his name, which is all that seems probable, she had been taught to disbelieve the mighty wonders of his hand, and was still less likely to believe his prophet.

Moreover she might argue, if this man by some secret mystery of his own, or through the power of his God, is able to procure so preternatural a supply for me, whence comes it to pass, that he now stands in want himself, oppressed both with hunger and thirst?

It appears therefore, that she must have been wrought upon by an unmixed principle of humanity.——She looked upon him as a fellow-partner almost in the same affliction with herself.——She considered he had come a weary pilgrimage, in a sultry climate, through an exhausted country; where neither bread or water were to be had, but by acts of liberality.——That he had come an unknown traveller, and as a hard heart never wants a pretence, that this circumstance, which should rather have befriended, might have helped to oppress him.——She

—She considered, for Charity is ever fruitful in kind reasons, that he was now far from his own country, and had strayed out of the reach of the tender offices of some one who affectionately mourned his absence—her heart was touched with pity.—She turned in silence and *went and did according as he had said.* And behold, both she, and he, and her house did eat many days; or, as in the margin, one whole year. *And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, until the day that God sent rain upon the earth.*

Though it may not seem necessary to raise conjectures here upon this event, yet it is natural to suppose, the danger of the famine being thus unexpectedly got over, that the mother began to look hopefully forwards upon the rest of her days. There were many widows in Israel at that time, when the heavens were shut up for three years and six months, yet as St. Luke observes, *to none of them was the prophet sent, save to this widow of Sarepta*: in all likelihood, she would not be the last in making the same observation, and drawing from it some flattering conclusion in favour of her son.—Many a parent would build high, upon a worse foundation.—“ Since the
“ God of Israel has thus sent his own messenger to us in our distress, to pass by so many
“ houses of his own people, and stop at mine,
“ to save it in so miraculous a manner from
“ destruction; doubtless, this is but an earnest
“ of his future kind intentions to us: at least,
“ his goodness has decreed to comfort my old
“ age

“age by the long life and health of my son :
 “—— but perhaps, he has something greater
 “still in store for him, and I shall live to see
 “the same hand hereafter crown his head with
 “glory and honour ?” We may naturally sup-
 pose her innocently carried away with such
 thoughts, when she is called back by an un-
 expected distemper which surprises her son,
 and in one moment brings down all her hopes
 —— *for his sickness was so sore that there was
 no breath left in him.* ——

The expostulations of immoderate grief are
 seldom just —— For, though Elijah had already
 preserved her son, as well as herself from
 immediate death, and was the last cause to
 be suspected of so sad an accident ; yet the pas-
 sionate mother, in the first transport, challenges
 him as the author of her misfortune ; as if he
 had brought down sorrow upon a house, which
 had so hospitably sheltered him. The prophet
 was too full of compassion, to make reply to
 so unkind an accusation. He takes the dead
 child out of his mother's bosom, and laid him upon
 his own bed ; and he cried unto the Lord and
 said, O Lord my God ! hast thou brought evil
 upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying
 her son ? “ Is this the reward of all her Cha-
 rity and goodness ? Thou hast before this
 “robbed her of the dear partner of all her
 “joys and all her cares ; and now that she is
 “a widow, and has most reason to expect
 “thy protection ; behold thou hast withdrawn
 “her last prop ; thou hast taken away her child,
 “the only stay she had to rest on.” —— *And
 Elijah*

Elijah cried unto God, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.

The prayer was urgent, and bespoke the distress of a humane mind deeply suffering in the misfortunes of another; — moreover his heart was rent with other passions. — He was zealous for the name and honour of his God, and thought not only his omnipotence, but his glorious attribute of mercy concerned in the event: for, oh! with what triumph would the prophets of Baal retort his own bitter taunt, and say, *his God was either talking, or he was pursuing, or was in a journey; or peradventure he slept and should have been awaked.* —

He was moreover involved in the success of his prayer himself; — honest minds are most hurt by scandal. — And he was afraid, lest so foul a one, so unworthy of his character, might arise amongst the heathen, who would report with pleasure, “Lo, the widow of Zerephath took the messenger of the God of Israel under her roof, and kindly entertained him, and see how she is rewarded; surely the prophet was ungrateful, he wanted power, or what is worse, he wanted pity!”

Besides all this, he pleaded not only the cause of the widow; it was the cause of Charity itself, which had received a deep wound already, and would suffer still more should God deny it this testimony of his favour. *So the Lord hearkened unto the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him*

him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother; and Elijah said, See thy son liveth.

It would be a pleasure to a good mind to stop here a moment, and figure to itself the picture of so joyful an event. — To behold on one hand the raptures of the parent, overcome with surprise and gratitude, and imagine how a sudden stroke of such impetuous joy must operate on a despairing countenance, long accustomed to sadness. — To conceive on the other side of the piece, the holy man approaching with the child in his arms — full of honest triumph in his looks, but sweetened with all the kind sympathy which a gentle nature could overflow with upon so happy an event. It is a subject one might recommend to the pencil of a great genius, and would even afford matter for description here; but that it would lead us too far from the particular purpose, for which I have enlarged upon thus much of the story already; the chief design of which is to illustrate by a fact, what is evident both in reason and Scripture, that a charitable and good action is seldom cast away, but that even in this life it is more than probable, that what is so scattered shall be gathered again with increase. *Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days. Be as a father unto the fatherless, and instead of a husband unto their mother, so shalt thou be as the son of the Most High, and he will love thee more than thy mother doth. Be mindful of good turns, for thou knowest not what evil shall come upon the earth; and when thou fallest*

fastest thou shalt find a stay. It shall preserve thee from all affliction, and fight for thee against thy enemies better than a mighty shield and a strong spear.

The great instability of temporal affairs, and constant fluctuation of every thing in this world, afford perpetual occasions of taking refuge in such a security.

What by successive misfortunes; by failings and cross accidents in trade; by miscarriage of projects: — what by unsuitable expences of parents, extravagance of children, and the many other secret ways whereby riches make themselves wings and fly away; so many surprising revolutions do every day happen in families, that it may not seem strange to say, that the posterity of some of the most liberal contributors here, in the changes which one century may produce, may possibly find shelter under this very plant, which they now so kindly water. Nay, so quickly sometimes has the wheel turned round, that many a man has lived to enjoy the benefit of that Charity which his own piety projected.

But besides this, and exclusive of the right which God's promise gives it to protection hereafter, Charity and benevolence, in the ordinary chain of effects, have a natural and more immediate tendency in themselves to rescue a man from the accidents of the world, by softening the hearts, and winning every man's wishes to its interest. When a compassionate man falls, who would not pity him? Who, that had power to do it, would not befriend

and raise him up? Or could the most barbarous temper offer an insult to his distress, without pain and reluctance? So that it is almost a wonder that covetousness, even in spite of itself, does not sometimes argue a man into Charity, by its own principle of looking forwards, and the firm expectation it would delight in of receiving its own again with usury.——So evident is it in the course of God's providence and the natural stream of things, that a good office one time or other generally meets with a reward.——Generally, did I say?——how can it ever fail?——When besides all this, so large a share of the recompence is so inseparable even from the action itself. Ask the man who has a tear of tenderness always ready to shed over the unfortunate; who, withal, is ready to distribute and willing to communicate: ask him if the best things, which wits have said of pleasure, have expressed what he has felt, when by a seasonable kindness, he has *made the heart of the widow sing for joy*. Mark then the expressions of unutterable pleasure and harmony in his looks; and say, whether Solomon has not fixed the point of true enjoyment in the right place, when he declares, “that he knew “no good there was in any of the riches or “honours of this world, *but for a man to do “good with them in his life.*” Nor was it without reason he made this judgment.——Doubtless he had found and seen the insufficiency of all sensual pleasures; how unable to furnish either a rational or a lasting scheme of happiness; how soon the best of them vanished;

the less exceptionable in vanity, but the guilty both in vanity and vexation of spirit. But that this was of so pure and refined a nature, it burned without consuming: it was figuratively the widow's barrel of meal which wasted not, and cruse of oil which never failed.

It is not an easy matter to add weight to the testimony of the wisest man, upon the pleasure of doing good; or else the evidence of the philosopher Epicurus is very remarkable, whose word in this matter is the more to be trusted, because a professed sensualist; who amidst all the delicacies and improvements of pleasure which a luxuriant fancy might strike out, still maintained, that the best way of enlarging human happiness was, by a communication of it to others.

And if it was necessary here, or there was time to refine upon this doctrine, one might further maintain, exclusive of the happiness which the mind itself feels, in the exercise of this virtue, that the very body of man is never in a better state than when he is most inclined to do good offices: — that as nothing more contributes to health than a benevolence of temper, so nothing generally was a stronger indication of it.

And what seems to confirm this opinion, is an observation, the truth of which must be submitted to every one's reflection — namely — that a disinclination and backwardness to do good, is often attended, if not produced, by an indisposition of the animal as well as rational part of us: — So naturally do the soul and

body, as in other cases so in this, mutually be friend, or prey upon each other. And indeed, setting aside all abstruse reasoning upon the point, I cannot conceive, but that the very mechanical motions which maintain life, must be performed with more equal vigour and freedom in that man whom a great and good soul perpetually inclines to shew mercy to the miserable, than they can be in a poor, sordid, selfish wretch, whose little, contracted heart, melts at no man's affliction; but sits brooding so intently over its own plots and concerns, as to see and feel nothing; and in truth, enjoy nothing beyond himself: and of whom one may say what that great master of nature has, speaking of a natural sense of harmony, which, I think, with more justice may be said of compassion, that the man who had it not, —

“ — *Was fit for treasours, stratagems and spoils:*

“ *The MOTIONS of his spirits are dull as night;*
And his affections dark as EREBUS:

“ — *Let no such man be trusted.* —

What divines say of the mind, naturalists have observed of the body; that there is no passion so natural to it as love, which is the principle of doing good; — and though instances like this just mentioned seem far from being proofs of it, yet it is not to be doubted, but that every hard-hearted man has felt much inward opposition before he could prevail upon himself to do

do ought to fix and deserve the character: and that what we say of long habits of vice, that they are hard to be subdued, may with equal truth be said concerning the natural impressions of benevolence, that a man must do much violence to himself, and suffer many a painful struggle, before he can tear away so great and noble a part of his nature.—Of this antiquity has preserved a beautiful instance in an anecdote of Alexander, the tyrant of Pheres, who though he had so industriously hardened his heart, as to seem to take delight in cruelty, insomuch as to murder many of his subjects every day, without cause and without pity; yet at the bare representation of a tragedy, which related the misfortunes of Hecuba and Andromache, he was so touched with the fictitious distress which the poet had wrought up in it, that he burst out into a flood of tears. The explication of which inconsistency is easy, and casts as great a lustre upon human nature, as the man himself was a disgrace to it. The case seems to have been this: in real life he had been blinded with passions, and thoughtlessly hurried on by interest or resentment:—but here, there was no room for motives of that kind; so that his attention being first caught hold of, and all his vices laid asleep;—then Nature awoke in triumph, and shewed how deeply she had sown the seeds of compassion in every man's breast; when tyrants, with vices the most at enmity with it, were not able entirely to root it out.

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But this is painting an amiable virtue, and setting her off, with shades which wickedness lends us, when one might safely trust to the force of her own natural charms, and ask, whether any thing under heaven in its own nature is more lovely and engaging? — To illustrate this the more, let us turn our thoughts within ourselves; and for a moment, let any number of us here imagine ourselves at this instant engaged in drawing the most perfect and amiable character, such as, according to our conceptions of the Deity, we should think most acceptable to him, and most likely to be universally admired by all mankind. — I appeal to your own thoughts, whether the first idea which offered itself to most of our imaginations, would not be that of a compassionate benefactor, stretching forth his hands to raise up the helpless orphan? Whatever other virtues we should give our hero, we should all agree in making him a generous friend, who thought the opportunities of doing good to be the only charm of his prosperity: we should paint him like the Psalmist's *river of God* overflowing the thirsty parts of the earth, that he might enrich them, carrying plenty and gladness along with him. If this was not sufficient, and we were still desirous of adding a farther degree of perfection to so great a character; we should endeavour to think of some one, if human nature could furnish such a pattern, who if occasion required, was willing to undergo all kinds of affliction, to sacrifice himself, to forget his dearest interests, and even lay down his

his life for the good of mankind.—And here, — O merciful Saviour! how would the bright original of thy unbounded goodness break in upon our hearts? *Thou who becamest poor, that we might be rich* — though Lord of all this world, yet *hadst not where to lay thy head*. — And though equal in power and glory to the great God of nature, yet *madest thyself of no reputation, tookest upon thee the form of a servant*, — submitting thyself, without opening thy mouth, to all the indignities which a thankless and undiscerning people could offer; and at length, to accomplish our salvation, *becamest obedient unto death, suffering thyself, as on this day *, to be led like a lamb to the slaughter!*

The consideration of this stupendous instance of compassion, in the Son of God, is the most unanswerable appeal that can be made to the heart of man, for the reasonableness of it in himself. — It is the great argument which the apostles use in almost all their exhortations to good works. — *Beloved, if Christ so loved us* — the inference is unavoidable; and gives strength and beauty to every thing else which can be urged upon the subject. And therefore I have reserved it for my last and warmest appeal, with which I would gladly finish this discourse, that at least for their sakes for whom it is preached, we might be left to the full impression of so exalted and so seasonable a motive. — That by reflecting upon the infinite labour of this day's love, in the instance

* Preached on Good-Friday.

of Christ's death, we may consider what an immense debt we owe each other: and by calling to mind the amiable pattern of his life, in doing good, we might learn in what manner we may best discharge it.

And indeed, of all the methods in which a good mind would be willing to do it, I believe there can be none more beneficial, or comprehensive in its effects, than that for which we are here met together. — The proper education of poor children being the groundwork of almost every other kind of Charity, as that which makes every other subsequent act of it answer the pious expectation of the giver.

Without this foundation first laid, how much kindness in the progress of a benevolent man's life is unavoidably cast away? and sometimes where it is as senseless as the exposing a tender plant to all the inclemencies of a cruel season, and then going with sorrow to take it in, when the root is already dead. I said, therefore, this was the foundation of almost every kind of Charity,—and might not one have added, of all policy too? Since the many ill consequences which attend the want of it, though grievously felt by the parties themselves, are no less so by the community of which they are members; and moreover, of all mischiefs seem the hardest to be redressed.—Inasmuch, that when one considers the disloyal seductions of popery on one hand, and on the other, that no bad man, whatever he professes, can be a good subject, one may venture to say, it had been cheaper and better for the nation to have bore the

the expence of instilling sound principles and good morals, into the neglected children of the lower sort, especially in some parts of Great Britain, than to be obliged, so often as we have been within this last century, to rise up and arm ourselves against the rebellious effects which the want of them have brought down even to our doors. And in fact, if we are to trust antiquity, the truth of which in this case we have no reason to dispute, this matter has been looked upon of such vast importance to the civil happiness and peace of a people, that some commonwealths, the most eminent for political wisdom, have chose to make a publick concern of it; thinking it much safer to be entrusted to the prudence of the magistrate, than to the mistaken tenderness or natural partiality of the parent.

It was consistent with this, and bespoke a very refined sense of policy in the Lacedæmonians, (though by the way, I believe, different from what more modern politics would have directed in like circumstances) when Antipater demanded of them fifty children, as hostages for the security of a distant engagement, they made this brave and wise answer, “ They would not, — they could not consent: — they would rather give him double the number of their best up-grown men.” — Intimating, that however they were distressed, they would chuse any inconvenience rather than suffer the loss of their country’s education; and the opportunity (which if once lost can never be regained) of giving their youth an early tincture

tinuance of religion, and bringing them up to a love of industry, and a love of the laws and constitution of their country.—If this shews the great importance of a proper education to children of all ranks and conditions, what shall we say then of those whom the providence of God has placed in the very lowest lot of life, utterly cast out of the way of knowledge, without a parent,——sometimes may be without a friend to guide and instruct them; but what common pity and the necessity of their sad situation engages:—where the dangers which surround them on every side are so great and many, that for one fortunate passenger in life, who makes his way well in the world with such early disadvantages, and so dismal a setting out, we may reckon thousands who every day suffer shipwreck, and are lost for ever.

If there is a case under heaven which calls out aloud for the more immediate exercise of compassion, and which may be looked upon as the compendium of all Charity, surely it is this: and I'm persuaded there would want nothing more to convince the greatest enemy to these kinds of Charities that it is so, but a bare opportunity of taking a nearer view of some of the more distressful objects of it.

Let him go into the dwellings of the unfortunate, into some mournful cottage, where poverty and affliction reign together. There let him behold the disconsolate widow—sitting—steeped in tears;——thus sorrowing over the infant, she knows not how to succour.——

“O my child, thou art now left exposed to
“a wide

“ a wide and a vicious world, too full of shares
“ and temptations for thy tender and unprac-
“ tised age. Perhaps a parent’s love may mag-
“ nify those dangers:—But when I consider
“ thou art driven out naked into the midst of
“ them without friends, without fortune, with-
“ out instruction, my heart bleeds beforehand
“ for the evils which may come upon thee.
“ God, in whom we trusted, is witness, fo
“ low had his providence placed us, that we
“ never indulged one wish to have made thee
“ rich, — virtuous we would have made
“ thee; — for thy father, *my husband, was*
“ *a good man and feared the Lord,* — and
“ though all the fruits of his care and indus-
“ try were little enough for our support, yet
“ he honestly had determined to have spared
“ some portion of it, scanty as it was, to have
“ placed thee safely in the way of knowledge
“ and instruction.—But alas! he is gone from
“ us, never to return more, and with him are
“ fled the means of doing it:—for, *Behold the*
“ *creditor is come upon us,* to take all that we
“ have.”—Grief is eloquent, and will not ea-
sily be imitated. — But let the man, who is
the least friend to distresses of this nature, con-
ceive some disconsolate widow uttering her
complaint even in this manner, and then let
him consider, *if there is any sorrow like this*
sorrow, wherewith the Lord has afflicted her?
or whether there can be any Charity like that,
of taking *the child out of the mother’s bosom,* and
rescuing her from these apprehensions. Should
a heathen, a stranger to our holy religion and
the

the love it teaches, should he, *as he journeyed, come to the place where she lay, when he saw, would he not have compassion on her?* God forbid a Christian should *this day* want it; or at any time look upon such a distress, and pass by on the other side.

Rather, let him do, as his Saviour taught him, *bind up the wounds, and pour comfort into the heart of one, whom the hand of God has so bruised.* Let him practise what it is, with Elijah's transport, to say to the afflicted widow, —*See, thy son liveth!* — liveth by my Charity, and the bounty of this hour, to all the purposes which make life desirable, — to be made a good man, and a profitable subject: on one hand to be trained up to such a sense of his duty, as may secure him an interest in the world to come; and with regard to this world, to be so brought up in it, to a love of honest labour and industry, as all his life long to earn and eat his bread with joy and thankfulness.

“ Much peace and happiness rest upon the
 “ head and heart of every one who thus brings
 “ children to Christ. — May the blessing of
 “ him that was ready to perish come season-
 “ ably upon him. — The Lord comfort him,
 “ *when he most wants it*, when he lays sick
 “ upon his bed; make thou, O God! all his
 “ bed in his sickness; and for what he now
 “ scatters, give him, then, that peace of thine
 “ which passeth all understanding, and which
 “ nothing in this world can either give or
 “ take away.” Amen.

S E R M O N XX.

The good Man's Support under Afflictions.

By the Rev. Mr. HOLLAND;

P S A L M xxxiv. 19.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.

IT is not perhaps desirable, that men should conceive too high and florid an idea of the happiness attending a good life. For though this may entice them into the path of wisdom; yet if while they advance forward, they meet with greater difficulties and with less constant and ravishing joys than they had promised themselves, such a disappointment will probably damp their resolution, and extinguish all their ardor in laudable pursuits. To what purpose then should we flatter ourselves or others with romantic hopes, the vanity of which may soon be evinced by fact and experience? Were it
not

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not more prudent, not to raise our expectations too high? Thus if things turn out but indifferently, we shall not be so grievously shocked, nor tempted to abandon virtue, as an empty name; if they prove better than our hopes, it will only be an agreeable and harmless disappointment. That man is the most likely to be steady and persevering in goodness, who at the time he embraceth it, is well assured it must leave him liable to great sufferings, and may itself expose him to severe trials. Hence our Saviour is so far from dissembling the hardships his disciples would undergo in consequence of their adhering to him, that he describes them at large, and exhorts them, either to follow him with these prospects, or not at all. Christians indeed were then exposed to more and greater calamities, than they ordinarily are; yet still good men are, and in this world always will be, subject to a variety of troubles and misfortunes.

Whatever fine schemes of happiness philosophers have described, or we may have framed in our own imaginations, certain it is, that many Afflictions often befall the best of men; some, that are common to them with the rest of mankind, and others, that are peculiar to persons of this character. The righteous man, as well as others, may be deserted by his friend, and abused by his enemies. Death may deprive him of those, that were as dear to him as his own life, and swell his heart with the tenderest sorrow. His virtue will not infallibly secure him from infamy and contempt, from losses

losses and disappointments in his worldly affairs; from poverty, and the thousand hardships that attend it, from bad health and painful distempers. If we deny, that these things are evils, we contradict nature and common sense: if we condemn all those as bad men, who have suffered such things, we are guilty of an uncharitable and groundless presumption. Even those rigid philosophers, who refused to call adversity and pain by the name of evils, gave them names no less, if not more formidable: they owned them to be sharp,—grievous,—contrary to nature,—hard to be endured; still they contended, they were not evils; that is, they differed from others in words, while they agreed with them in the sense of things, and ridiculously denied in one sentence, what they affirmed in another.

No less absurd would it be to conclude, that they, who suffer Afflictions, cannot therefore be righteous men, though they seem to be so in outward appearance; thus we should rashly strike out of the list of the virtuous, many, that have the fairest pretensions to merit: for who can produce a better claim to integrity, than he, who has retained the appearance of it in difficult trials? What melancholy accidents have not sometimes, nay often, befallen the most excellent persons? Job, to whom God himself bore this testimony, that *he was a perfect and an upright man*, was visited with a complication of lamentable misfortunes; deprived by death of all his children; stripped of an affluent fortune, which it is much more grievous
to

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to have lost, than never to have enjoyed; tormented with intolerable pains of body, insulted with scorn and derision, by those, who had before been maintained by his bounty; his friends, in the mean time, instead of comforting him, reproaching him as an hypocrite, and looking upon him with horror, as a victim devoted to the divine vengeance. These, and the like evils, fall upon the righteous and the wicked without distinction.

But virtue has other sorrows, in a great measure peculiar to herself: for besides his own private Afflictions, the good man, through the tenderness of his heart, feels the calamities of his fellow creatures, and shares in the manifold evils he sees them suffer. The sorrows of a friend, the dejection of the poor, the tears of the mourner, and the sighs of the afflicted, which some can observe with great tranquillity, affect his soul with a lively concern. But nothing moves his compassion more, than the vices of mankind, which others often make the subject of their diversion. When he observes men hurting themselves and one another by their own follies, creating wretched disorders in human society, and even threatening it with ruin by the general corruption of their lives and manners; in seeing and hearing his benevolent spirit is grieved from day to day with their unlawful deeds. He also secretly mourns his own imperfections. In this world, folly cleaves to all, in different degrees; but they, who have the largest share of it, have this comfort, that they

they can seldom find any in themselves; while such as have the least perceive it to their sorrow.

Lastly. Righteousness or virtue sometimes draws upon itself the hatred of bad men, with all the evils, they are able to inflict. Eminent worth, which outshines others, and makes them appear despicable and mean, provokes their envy, the most bitter and deadly of human passions. *Wrath, says Solomon, is cruel; and anger is outrageous: but who is able to stand before envy?* Prov. xvii. 4. Many a great and good man, it is certain, has fallen a sacrifice to it, merely on account of his distinguished merit. Besides, integrity may lead a man to oppose the wicked in their unjust and mischievous designs; wherefore these will join themselves to such as envy him, and increase the number of his enemies. Nay, it is no uncommon thing for a good man to incur the general odium of a corrupt age. By declaring against the superstitious principles and evil customs of the times, he may irritate the multitude against him, whose passions being managed and heightened by the arts of the crafty few, may carry them to seek and rejoice in his ruin. That virtue indeed, which is moderate, and riseth not above the common pitch, is generally safe and popular enough; but they, who have dared to be singularly and eminently good, have met with severe trials of their constancy. How justly then may we deplore the condition of human life, where men are so often treated ill for deserving well; where, while some are rewarded for their crimes,

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others are punished for their virtues; and where such, as have nobly endeavoured to stem the tide of corruption, have been overwhelmed and lost in the prevailing torrent. No villain, no murderer, has at any time been prosecuted with greater zeal, than some of the most excellent and godlike men; that ever blessed this unworthy earth: they have suffered not only detraction, calumny and scorn, but bonds, imprisonment, torture and death, from an ungrateful world, which was indebted to them for the most important services. Socrates was poisoned; Jesus Christ was crucified and slain. Such, O God, has been the portion of thy sons; such, O Virtue, the fate of thy best and bravest followers! — Thus it appears, that the righteous are in this world exposed to many great Afflictions; to many, that are common to them with the rest of mankind; to many, that are peculiar to themselves, as being the fruits of their own integrity. Insomuch that in all the catalogue of human evils, we cannot find one, from which virtue is perfectly secure, except only guilt and its natural consequences.

The various calamities, that have befallen the innocent and good, have furnished an objection against the equity of providence, which deserves to be considered. If God is just and good, he loves the righteous; and if he loves them, why does he suffer them to be visited with such heavy Afflictions? Was he, like man, ignorant and weak, he might perhaps be excused upon one or both of these accounts; but he is neither unacquainted with their sufferings, nor does

he want power to save and deliver them; for he constantly observes all human affairs, and appoints to every man what condition he pleaseth without the least difficulty to himself. What shall we say then? Has he no concern for the happiness of good men? Does he regard alike the righteous and the wicked? Since both we see under his government are involved in the same outward calamities. Such considerations have sometimes perplexed those who believe, and emboldened those who deny, that the affairs of mankind are conducted by a wise and righteous providence. I shall therefore endeavour to vindicate the ways of heaven in this respect, and shew, that both the confidence of the prophane, and the doubts of the pious, which arise from hence, are without foundation.

If God lays Affliction upon the righteous, it is not because he has no distinguishing regard for them; but because their sufferings may answer many valuable purposes both to others and themselves. First, I say, others may reap various advantages by observing the sufferings of good men. By such events God may intend to admonish us, that prosperity is not the best of blessings, nor adversity the worst of evils; since he frequently dispenses the one, and denies the other to his own children. But we are too prone to mistake the divine admonitions, and instead of learning from them those important lessons, they are calculated to teach, we turn them into arguments against his goodness; we hastily presume, that outward misfortunes are

the heaviest calamities, and then arraign the divine government for permitting them to fall upon good men: whereas we ought rather to argue, that because God distributes them to those he loves, therefore they cannot be the greatest of evils. It should certainly diminish our aversion to poverty, disgrace and pain, and teach us not to dread them as principally miserable, when we consider, that these things have been allotted by the best of beings to his beloved Son, and to many of his favourites in all ages.

The suffering of the righteous may also be of service to the world; as by this means their virtues are more clearly displayed, and recommended with greater force to the imitation of mankind. Merit while attended with ease and prosperity, is scarce discernible to mortal eyes; at best it makes but a faint and doubtful appearance: never is its lustre so evident, nor its form half so engaging, as when we view it through the medium of distress. How can a man's patience be known without adversity? or his fortitude, except he has hardships to endure, and dangers to encounter? How can his piety become conspicuous, if it cost him nothing? or his integrity, if he has no temptation to be dishonest. So long as goodness and worldly interest invite him to pursue the same road, it is not possible we should know for certain, which of them he follows; or whose voice he principally regards. But let the path divide; let integrity exhort him to go one way, and the world another, if he still adheres to righteousness,

ness, when it leads him directly to toil and suffering, men doubt no longer of the sincerity of his goodness; and the approved reality and firmness of his virtue, which is confessed and admired by all, kindles in many a spirit of emulation. Hence God is said to try good men with Afflictions; not that he has recourse to this method in order to satisfy himself concerning their characters; for he knows perfectly what they are, and how they would behave in all circumstances, without any experiments of this kind: but by his trying them is meant, that he thus gives their fellow creatures an opportunity, which they would otherwise want of discovering their virtues.

When the Father of all intends to raise up great characters for the benefit of mankind, he makes them to appear glorious by their sufferings. Passing by therefore the weak and worthless (for these would sink under the weight of adversity) and calling forth the noblest souls, we may imagine him thus revealing to them the intention of his providence. "I know and love

" your sincere righteousness; but it is requisite
" for the good of mankind, which is not to
" you a matter of indifference, that they should
" know it too: nor can they know it, unless
" they observe you tried with Affliction. I will
" therefore produce you upon a theatre, where,
" in the view of the world, you shall conflict,
" some of you with poverty, others with pain,
" others with death in its most frightful forms:
" come and shew them the vigor of your
" minds; set before them examples of an inte-

"grity, which they cannot but see, and which
 "they cannot see without admiration; and by
 "a noble sufferance convince both your own
 "and succeeding ages, that virtue, complete
 "and genuine virtue, is quite invincible!"

Upon this point we might safely rest the cause of providence; since it is plain the Afflictions of the righteous tend to the general good, which a just governor will always prefer to the interest of any individuals.

But we may further observe, that their Afflictions often produce great advantages to the sufferers themselves. Among these, I am not afraid to mention the glory they derive from hence. For though a good man will not principally covet fame, yet human nature cannot be indifferent about it; and the prospect of it may justly afford the wisest and best a lively satisfaction. Suffering virtue at least may surely be allowed to comfort itself with the foresight of that veneration, which is wrongfully withheld from it when living; but which posterity will pay with interest to its surviving memory. If then the prospect of honour, immortal honour, is so justly agreeable to the human heart, it should rather be esteemed a favour, than an injury, when God gives the righteous an occasion to signalize themselves, by leading them to encounter dangers and evils. Human governors are commended, when they take care, that eminent worth should be known and distinguished; and shall we blame the governor of all for consulting the glory of good men, and taking care, that their virtue shall be applauded,
 and

and their names revered throughout all generations.

Nor is it a small advantage, that by means of their sufferings the righteous may attain a comfortable assurance of their own constancy. As it is impossible for others, so it is not easy for us to know the strength of our virtue, before it has been tried. While we enjoy wealth, and the respect of mankind, how can we be assured, we could bear manfully indigence and contempt? We wrong no man; but what should we do, if we lay under some strong and pressing temptation? We are satisfied with the disposals of providence now things go on according to our own wish; but should we still maintain a calm and pious temper, if it should please God to visit us with some great loss or heavy Affliction? We profess religion, when it is held in esteem: but if piety was to become unfashionable, or expose us to persecution, should we not be so weak as to abandon it? With relation to such things, modest and considerate men are apt to entertain some diffidence of themselves; but when God has furnished them with opportunities of trying their strength, and they have found, that their virtue will stand the test of adversity, they have good reason to lay aside their doubts, and are guilty of no presumption in taking to themselves the satisfaction, which springs from a growing confidence of their own integrity.

Sometimes also adversity is profitable to good men, as it helps to cure them of their remaining imperfections. God is concerned (if I

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may so speak) to observe some little blemishes sullying those characters, which are in the main amiable in his eyes; he therefore visits them with Afflictions, which are adapted to polish their souls, and work them up to greater perfection. If he discerns in them some secret vanity, he tames and humbles them by sufferings. Are they too fond of outward enjoyment? He convinces them of its vanity, by depriving them of it. Are they so taken up with the overflowings of his goodness, as to be unmindful of the spring? He withdraws the stream, and thus recalls them to the inexhaustible fountain of living waters. The sovereign physician perfectly understands the disorders of every soul, and applies those remedies, which, though painful in their operation, are most salutary in their effects: wherefore the bitter draughts, he sometimes administers to good men, are so far from betraying a want of regard for them, that they are themselves proofs of his care for their interest. As good fathers correct their children out of kindness to them; so their heavenly father chastens the righteous, because he loves them.

Afflictions are the discipline, by which God trains up his beloved children to higher degrees of virtue and perfection; he ensures them to hardships that he may improve their constancy; and plies them with sufferings, that by bearing often, they may learn to bear well the accidents of life. Strength of mind, as well as of body, is gained by exercise, and impaired through indolence. A continual enjoyment of ease and pleasure,

pleasure, melts the soul, and makes it incapable of resisting the slightest impressions of pain; but repeated conflicts with fortune strengthen its nerves, confirm its fortitude and patience, and enable it at length to conquer with ease the evils of mortality. Trees, that are exposed to frequent blasts, strike deep root, and are not so easily broken, as those, that grow secure from storms, in some low valley: in like manner, minds that have been well exercised with the storms of fortune, will stand much firmer against them, than such as have enjoyed a perpetual calm.

He must be a fool indeed, who counts upon passing through this world without meeting with any misfortunes: there is therefore but one way of attaining to a state of security; namely, that since we cannot hope to be exempted from Afflictions, our hearts be prepared and fortified against them. Do you think those happy and favored of heaven, who are dissolved in luxury and ease? Fatal indulgence! which disarms and softens the soul, and leaves it an easy prey to approaching distress. While their enemy is hastening towards them, they lose their strength instead of encreasing it. Trouble, to which all men are born, will overtake us sooner or later, and the longer it is delayed the less will they be qualified to bear it. But God deals more favorably with the righteous, when he seems to treat them with severity; he hardens them with labor and pain, as a good general his soldiers: that being duly disciplined for the warfare of life, they may col-

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left more vigor, and go through the hardships of it with chearfulness; neither daunted by the appearance of danger, nor desponding under the pressure of calamity.

Providence therefore is fully vindicated with regard to the Afflictions of good men, which we see are profitable, not only to mankind around them, but also to themselves. Even in the present constitution of things, where the righteous are exposed to so many sufferings, God has not left them without distinguishing marks of his favor; having made virtue in the darkest circumstances preferable to vice in those, we esteem the best and most fortunate. The good man has many Afflictions: so also has the sinner. He has some Afflictions, which the sinner escapes: he escapes many evils, with which the sinner is tormented. He has not the tumults of rage and lust; he has not the repinings of envy; he has not the cares and anxieties of avarice; he has not the burning desires and bitter disappointments of ambition; and in avoiding intemperance he avoids a manifold and certain plague: he has not, in fine, that consciousness of guilt, which haunts the wicked breast, and fills it with dreadful apprehensions; and which would far outweigh all the calamities of the brave and good, though earth and sea were thrown with them into the same balance.

The good man has many Afflictions, he has also many substantial enjoyments. I dare not assure him, that he shall obtain wealth and honor, and ease and pleasure; and indeed, if I could,

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could, this would signify little to him; because he is not solicitous about them, nor discontented at their absence: and yet thus far perhaps I might safely go; that in general he stands at least as fair to obtain them, as one of an opposite character. However, with regard to these precarious things, he must take his chance; for they are often, though not always, denied to the wise and good; and bestowed upon fools and knaves; yet they cannot make these happy; nor can the want of them make the righteous miserable. But I dare assure to him the immediate enjoyment of much nobler satisfactions, in the peace and composure of his mind; in the consciousness of doing and deserving well; in the calm and steady approbation of his own heart. These are blessings peculiar to virtue, inseparably connected with it by the eternal law of God and nature; of which it cannot be hindered or deprived: which, whoever enjoys, cannot be miserable, and whoever wants, cannot be happy.

Does the righteous suffer many Afflictions? He has many powerful supports under them. First, the native strength of his virtue, which enables him to break their force by opposing to them a firm and constant mind. For, when sufferings are born with fortitude and patience, if they do not entirely lose their nature as evils, it is certain they lose much of their weight. The weak and pusillanimous, who voluntarily sink under the pressures of pain, would be quite oppressed by those Afflictions, which the good man exerting the strength, he derives from
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his virtue, can bear with chearfulness. Religion also lends him a powerful aid; his sense of a present approving Deity, the witness of his sufferings and of his behaviour under them; his submission to heaven, which he is persuaded, orders for the best all events, and such as relate to himself in particular; his confidence in God, both living and dying; and his lively hope of immortal blessedness in a future state, conspire to sustain his soul, and keep it erect and steady under the heaviest burdens, that are laid upon him.

Thus, notwithstanding the calamities, which befall good men, we may find in this world plain traces of a due order and equitable providence. God has given strong proofs of his regard for them, and the favour, he shews them here, affords a good presumption, that he will not neglect their interest hereafter. Since he has consulted their welfare in life, we may be assured he will not drop them at death, but continue to employ his providence in their behalf, through all the stages of their future being. Virtue, says a late excellent author, exposed as she is here, is not however abandoned or left miserable; she has enough to raise her above pity, though not above our wishes: and as happy as we see her here, we have room for further hopes in her behalf. Her present portion is sufficient to shew providence already engaged on her side; and since there is such provision for her here, such happiness and such advantages even in this life; how probable must it appear, that this providential care

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is extended yet further to a succeeding life, and perfected hereafter.

These presumptions concerning the happiness of virtue in a future state, which are made probable by reason, are ascertained and confirmed beyond all doubt, by the Gospel revelation: here we are assured, that they, who have spent their lives in doing and suffering according to the will of God; shall be removed, when they die, into a state of eternal peace and unspeakable felicity. Death is a secure haven to the good man's soul; where, as soon as he arrives (and shortly he must) God will put a final period to his troubles, and crown him with immortal glory and happiness.

—Thus at last he will deliver the righteous out of all his Afflictions. Or, we may say with the Psalmist, that he does deliver him now: either because the joyful prospect of the glorious event, makes him as it were insensible of present calamities, or because the time of his deliverance is so near at hand, that it may be considered, as in a manner actually present. — Let what has been said suffice in discoursing upon this subject. The sum of all is this; that the righteous do indeed suffer in this world many Afflictions; but that we have no reason to distrust upon this account, either the equity of providence, or the wisdom of being righteous.

S E R-

S E R M O N XXI.

The Duty of loving our Enemies stated
and explained.

Preached before the University of Oxford, 1733.

By the Rev. Mr. SEED.

MATTHEW V. 44.

*But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them
that curse you, do good to them that hate you,
and pray for them which despitefully use you and
persecute you.*

TH E R E is an inseparable connection between malice and unhappiness: and it is an obvious remark, that the most malevolent being in the universe is the most unhappy and accursed spirit in it, whose temper resembles that blackness of darkness, to which he is reserved; as on the other hand, the great Being, who is infinitely good and an inexhaustible fountain

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tain of blessings to all his creatures, is infinitely happy and blessed in himself for evermore. That we might, in some degree, resemble God in goodness, our Saviour virtually enjoins an universal benevolence, by enjoining even the love of our enemies; a love not dead and unperforming, but such as exerts itself in the most proper and significant expressions, as speaking well of them, praying for them, and doing good to them. In opposition to the narrow notions of the Scribes, who taught the people, without any authority from the Old Testament for teaching them so, that they were permitted to hate their enemies; he recommends a prevailing, habitual and unmixed sweetness of temper, without the least gall of bitterness in our composition against any man; that sweetness of temper, which, if it does not give a man such a shining and glaring figure, as some other accomplishments do; yet constitutes the most lovely, beautiful, and agreeable character, and gains unenvied praise.

The best comment on his words will be,

I. To state the nature and extent of the duty enjoined, viz. the Love of our Enemies.

II. To shew the reasonableness of it.

III. The practicableness of it.

IV. To subjoin some considerations, which may enable us to reduce it to practice.

I. Then, I am to state the nature and extent of this precept.

There are two kinds of love which we must distinguish here; the love of approbation or esteem; and the love of benevolence or goodwill.

will. Now it may be impossible sometimes to pay the former kind of love, in any great degree, to our enemy, as when his vices far overbalance his virtues: we cannot love, with any considerable degree of approbation and complacency, him, who does not appear, upon the whole, lovely to our understanding. However, as human nature, though degenerated, is still in some measure amiable, as no body is completely wicked, as men are generally of a mixed character; less degrees of goodness may entitle him at least to a less degree of our esteem and good-liking.

But should it be granted, that we could not regard an immoral enemy with any love of approbation; yet still this would not excuse us from shewing a love of benevolence and good-will to him. A parent, for instance, is far from approving a child who is stubborn, disobedient and immoral; yet still his love of benevolence and good-will shall continue in all its force and efficacy: and it is this kind of love which the Scripture seems to require from us; *if our enemy hunger, we are to feed him; if he thirst, we are to give him drink.* The love of approbation and the love of benevolence are then very distinct in their own nature. Our Saviour, at the same time that he expressed his disapprobation and dislike of Jerusalem for *stoning the prophets*; yet exemplified a very benevolent and compassionate regard for it: for *he wept over it.*

Even resentment does not exclude benevolence, and we are very often angry at a person
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for committing a fault, even because we love him. We may then resent any injurious behaviour; provided our resentment does not destroy our good-will and affection, and end in malice.

And as our Saviour loved and compassionated the Jews, though he abhorred their ungenerous treatment of himself and the prophets; so we ought, with the same god-like generosity of soul, to love the man at the same time, that we detest his vices: just as we may have an affectionate regard for a person that lies ill, but have an aversion to the disease he labours under.

As to the extent and degrees of this duty, the Scripture no where enjoins an undistinguishing beneficence to men whether friendly or injurious. We are to *do good to all*, but more especially to some, according to their different merits, circumstances, and relation to us. Yet it is, I think, our duty to prefer compassion to an enemy, before a matter of mere generosity to a friend, when we cannot exercise both together. My meaning is this: when we can, consistently with the public good and our own, rescue an enemy from the very brink of ruin and extreme misery by the same sum of money, which would but make a slender addition to the happiness of a friend, as having already an easy or perhaps an ample fortune; in such a case, we ought to sacrifice the mere conveniency of the latter to the pressing necessities of the former; and that for this plain reason, because we ought to do the most good we can. Now by singling

but men of fortune, whatever relations may render them to us, as the objects of our favour, we contribute little or nothing to their real enjoyments; but by being, what God is in a higher degree, *the helper of the friendless* and forlorn, we make the heart of one, that was *ready to perish, sing for joy*. In the former case our bounty is like a shower to the ocean; in the latter it is like a shower to dry and thirsty ground. This is a very important rule, viz. that the extreme necessity of even our enemies, much more of other persons, is to take place of the mere convenience of friends and relations, and that we ought rather to relieve the distressed than to promote the happiness of the easy; however the practice of it be disregarded by the world.

But to proceed, the Scripture does not require any acts of kindness to our enemy, which are confessedly prejudicial to our own interests; for we are not to *love our neighbour better than ourselves*. It no where lays us open and defenceless to the injurious assaults of our enemy; for that would be to give the worst a continual advantage over the best. It forbids indeed all desire of private revenge; but does not prohibit acts of public justice, and an assertion of our important rights against the invaders of them. We may prosecute an adversary, not indeed to gratify the envenomed rancour of our heart; but with a view to the reparation of our own wrongs and the publick good. The law and the Gospel are very consistent, and we cannot with any propriety be said to endeavour to return an injury, when we strive to recover a loss or damage.

mage. Turn the other cheek to him that smites thee, give thy cloak to him that took thy coat, are to be understood with the allowances which are made for proverbial expressions, and concerning tolerable injuries; and the sense is: rather run the risque of suffering a second loss or affront of a lighter nature; than, by attempting to revenge the first and rigorously insisting upon every petty right, ruffle your spirits, sacrifice the evenness and composure of your mind, and lose the most amiable spirit of charity, the worst loss and most fatal to your happiness of any, that you can sustain; it being better to receive than to give any ill treatment, as it is better to give than to receive favours. A man of a true Christian spirit of the two would chuse rather to suffer, than to do a hard thing, and rather to do, than accept a kindness.

Our mercy to our enemies must not be so far extended, as to expose us to the mercy of our enemies: only we are rather to put up a slighter offence and recede a little from our right, than by the prosecution of it very probably draw upon ourselves a very considerable injury, and besides endanger the peace of our minds. And in matters of greater offence, we must strive to redress our wrongs, by those calm and sedate methods, which cool reason suggests; and not by any acts of violence, outrage and insult.

II. Having thus stated the nature and extent of this duty, I proceed secondly to shew the reasonableness of it.

First, the great law of nature is an universal, active benevolence to the whole body of rational

beings, as far as the sphere of our power extends. We were all sent into the world to promote one another's happiness, as being all children of the same Father, *our Father which is in heaven*. What Moses said to the contending Israelites, is applicable to all mankind; *Why do ye wrong one another since ye are brethren?* And as no injuries can take away or cancel that unchangeable relation, which we bear to every one of our fellow creatures; so neither can any injuries take away or cancel our obligation to the duty of love, which results from that relation, to every one of them: it is founded upon reasons, which continue the *same yesterday, to day, and for ever*. *Renoual without of man*

For, do we do good to our nearest and dearest relations only, because they are deserving? Do we not think ourselves obliged to serve them merely, because they are relations? Yes undoubtedly. It appears then that the relation, which we have to a person, not his worth only, is the foundation of benevolence. Now we bear a relation (though not so strict and endearing a one) to a neighbour, a fellow creature, or fellow Christian, as well as to a parent or son: and if we are obliged to promote the happiness of our kindred, notwithstanding their unworthiness, merely upon the account of the relation, which they bear to us; the relation, in which we stand to all mankind, will infer an obligation to consult their good likewise in a less degree, in proportion as the relation is more distant. In a word, this relation is always a strong reason

reason for doing good, when there is no stronger reason to supercede or set it aside.

If all benevolence be so great a virtue, our virtue must arise higher in proportion to our benevolence; and consequently we exemplify the strongest and most powerful virtue, when we shew the strongest benevolence: but that benevolence must be the strongest, which can bear up and exert itself under the weight and pressure of those injuries, with which our enemies may load us. This way of arguing seems to be confirmed by the words of our Saviour, *If ye love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?* This is no more than what is ordinarily done: to be kind to such persons, is, strictly speaking, to be just to them: it is rather discharging a debt of gratitude, than doing a favour. But when we do good to them that have aggrieved and used us ill, this is chiefly praise-worthy and acceptable to God. The love of our enemies therefore, when under due regulations, when it does not impower or animate them to do more disservices, must evidence an uncommon energy of soul, and an unusual superiority of virtue.

The man, who is pushed on by too deep a sensibility of injuries to make reprizals, shews by his uneasiness, that his happiness lies at his adversary's mercy; and that it is in every body's power, who has the inclination, to disturb his precarious repose: but he, who, through a firm, resolved, unconquerable principle of good-

ness, returns good for evil, is always superior to his enemy; his superior in benevolence and good-will, that very excellency, which is as much the very loveliness and beauty of the soul, as justness of proportion and an agreeable mixture of colours constitute the beauty of the body.

And this may serve to shew, that however forward persons of the first distinction in civil and military offices may be to engross to themselves the character of heroism or any uncommon degree of virtue; a man in a private capacity may be as truly a hero in virtue, as they can be in a larger and more publick sphere of action. The meanest mechanick, who employs his love and gratitude, the best of his affections, upon God, the best of beings; who has a particular regard and esteem for the virtuous few, compassion for the distressed, and a fixed and extensive good-will for all; who instead of triumphing over his enemies, strives to subdue his greatest enemy of all, his unruly passion; who promotes a good understanding between neighbours, composes and adjusts differences, does justice to an injured character, and acts of charity to distressed worth; who cherishes his friends, forgives his enemies, and even serves them in any pressing exigency; who abhors vice, and pities the vicious person; such a man, however low in station, has juster pretensions to the title of heroism, as heroism implies a certain nobleness and elevation of soul, breaking forth into correspondent actions, than he who conquers armies, or makes the most glaring

figure in the eye of an injudicious world. He is like one of the fixed stars, which, though, through the disadvantage of its situation, it may be thought to be very little, inconsiderable, and obscure by unskilful beholders; yet is as truly great and glorious in itself as those heavenly lights, which, by being placed more commodiously for our view, shine with more distinguished lustre.

Narrow is that man's soul, which the good of himself or of his own relations and friends can fill: but he, who, with a benevolence warm as the heat of the sun, and diffusive as its light, takes in all mankind, and is sincerely glad to see poverty, whether in friend or foe, relieved, and worth cherished; makes the merit of all the good that is done in the world, his own, by the complacency, which he takes in seeing or hearing it done. For he shews, by his complacency, that he would have done the same, if his abilities had been equal to his inclinations.

Secondly, an argument may be drawn from the consideration of our own happiness.

Now to cultivate the sweet and kindly passions, to cherish an affectionate and social temper, to beget in ourselves, by repeated acts of goodness, a settled complacency, good-will and benevolence to all mankind in general, is a constant spring of satisfaction. By this means we relish our very nature; it is this temper, that generally procures us the peace of the world without; and always give us that unruffled peace within, which the world cannot give. It pro-

duces a mutual intercourse of friendly offices and endearments; as revenge occasions a perpetual round of receiving and returning injuries. To contract an unrelenting malice, fullness and discontent, to let a sudden discomposure of mind ripen into a fixed aversion and ill-will, to have a savageness of nature and an insensibility to pity: what is this but to make our breast, which should be the *temple of God*, as it were a den of savage passions? The Scriptures by a very beautiful metaphor call this temper the *leaven of malice*: for as a little leaven spreads and ferments, till it has diffused itself over the whole mass; so anger and malice are of that spreading nature, that by degrees they entirely sour and embitter the temper, and engross the whole man to themselves.

In acts of severity, even when necessary, there is always something that is irksome to a gentle and compassionate spirit; something of a harsh and ungrateful feeling within accompanies them; like armour, which, though we may be obliged to put it on for our necessary self-defence, yet always sits uneasy, cumbrous and unweildy.

Some cool thinking villains there may be, who can lay plots to injure others with a steadfast and sedate malice, and with an untoward complacency; their minds being like those nights, which are very calm, silent and close, and yet very black and dark; nights in which there reigns a sullen stillness. But men of this stamp are very rare: the generality of mankind, when they strive to make others uneasy, cer-
tainly

tainly disquiet themselves, and work out the ruin of other men, as they should do their own salvation, with fear and trembling. Their whole time is engrossed and their endeavours laid out, either in forming measures to blacken the character and ruin the fortune of their adversaries; or in defeating their attempts, disproving their slanders, and countermining their plots.

Surely those, who indulge this savage bent of inclination, have never tasted the joys of an hearty reconciliation: when that corroding uneasiness, which before oppressed the soul like a dead weight, is removed; and our souls appear once more like their great original, pure unmingled love, without any remaining drops of bitterness and distaste. At that instant all our suspicions, distrusts, and jealousies are unravelled; our enemy's ill actions and offensive behaviour, are softened and qualified by several alleviating considerations; and his good qualities shine out with a full and triumphant lustre.

Let this therefore be the second argument for our benevolence to our enemies, viz. that we ought to cultivate that love, in which there is no torment; whereas a soul embittered with revenge is a perpetual seat of war. Could we but trace the inward workings of a vindictive mind, could we but know with what tormenting thoughts the soul of our adversary had laboured between the first birth of his revengeful designs, and the last execution of them; we should rather pity him as an unhappy man, than detest him, as a malignant enemy.

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It is allowed, that a genuine unmixed malice, without the least tincture of benevolence and love, without one social and enlarged affection, is productive of misery. But for the same reason, that it is confessed, that such a thorough and mere malice, at its full growth, is the source of unhappiness and self-torment; it ought to be confessed that malice in a much less degree must cause misery in a less degree, or in other words, that the degree of misery must bear proportion to the degree of malice and ill-nature: not to mention that rancour in a lower degree paves the way and disposes the mind for this vice in a much higher, till at last it arrives at its fulness of stature. In a word, whatever disturbs the calm, easy course of our passions, must make us miserable. If a temper thoroughly rancorous render a person thoroughly wretched, then he, who is in part malicious, must be in part or in such a degree uneasy.

A third argument for the love of our enemies may be drawn from the forgiveness of them. Now, the forgiveness of our enemies is a duty incumbent on us: because, in the first place, malice is, as I shewed before, destructive of our happiness: because, 2dly, we cannot with any reason ask that of God which we are not willing to bestow: because, 3dly, all private revenge, and consequently the desire of it too, is in the nature of the thing unlawful; since if it were allowed, it would draw a fatal train of consequences after it, and make the world an Acedama or field of blood. Every one would be apt to fancy himself aggrieved, when he was
not;

not, and his anger, a precipitate and undistinguishing passion, would carry him too far, when he really was so. We know that the malignity of the offence arises in proportion to the dignity of the person, whom we offend: now, most people are inclined to think themselves much greater than they are, and consequently to think the offence committed against them to be so too; the consequence of which is obvious, if we were commissioned to revenge ourselves. The mists of passion would represent injuries bigger than they are, and it would be impossible to proportion the punishment to the indignity. In short, it can never be reasonable, that one man's reputation, fortune or life should be sacrificed to another man's passion and malice. Now if upon these grounds an absence of malice is highly requisite, if we are not to harbour any revengeful thoughts, how are we to behave ourselves to those whom we forgive? Are we to behave ourselves to them as to enemies? Or as we should to other men? Not as to enemies: for then we do not sincerely forgive them. We must then behave ourselves to them, as we should to other men; that is, with a love of benevolence and humanity: for benevolence and humanity is a debt we owe to all mankind.

Besides, it is unnatural to have a cold indifference to the happiness or misery of our fellow-creatures, when our minds are divested of all rancour towards them. Benevolence will naturally shed abroad in our heart its kindly and gentle beams, when the clouds, which the unfriendly

unfriendly passions cast over the soul, are removed and dispersed.

And farther, whatever distinction some people may make between giving and forgiving; yet to give to an adversary, when his pressing exigencies require it, and our circumstances enable us, is the most substantial proof, that we sincerely forgive him.

A fourth argument may be drawn from the nature of God.

No creature ought to counteract his Creator. Now when we harbour malice, and wish the unhappiness of any man, we insolently counteract our Creator, who hates nothing that he has made, and wills the happiness of all his creatures. We are guilty of a flagrant disloyalty to the inexhaustible fountain of good, who is infinitely lovely in himself, and infinitely loving towards us. Whereas when we strive to be as beneficial to them as we can, we act in concert with him, who *makes his sin to rise on the evil and on the good.* A malicious man acts in direct opposition to that love, that infinite love by which he himself was created, and is upheld, and which alone upholds all that variety of beings that people the creation.

Lastly, those who maintain the unreasonableness of this duty, if they would speak ingenuously, must express themselves after the following manner. "Man is a very frail and faulty creature, his actions often bad, and his thoughts worse than his actions. What then? Must I love no body, because every body has his faults? no: but this is my settled

“ tled persuasion. Man, however faulty, as
 “ long as he sins against others or himself, is
 “ entitled to my love and good nature; but
 “ from that moment he sins against me, he
 “ forfeits all title to humanity and mercy. The
 “ blood of Christ may atone for offences against
 “ the rest of mankind; but his own shall ex-
 “ piate those committed against myself.”

III. I proceed, 3dly, to shew the practicability of this duty.

It must be granted that it is easy to have a love of benevolence and good-will to a man, whom we have no malice against. The only question therefore is, whether it be practicable to abstain from revengeful and malicious designs against our enemies.

And here two sorts of men fall under our consideration: 1. Men of cool and deliberate malice, who, like lions lurking in secret places, can wait a considerable time, till, a convenient season offering itself, they spring to vengeance, and crush their unwary foe: their resentment is like a massy stone, slowly raised; but, when once it is raised, on *whomsoever it falls, it will grind them to powder.* And, 2dly, the men of fire and fury, who immediately discharge the malignity of their passion in words or actions.

As to the first set of men; it is certain that the same power of mind, which enables them to suspend the prosecution of their revengeful designs till a commodious opportunity, enables them likewise to get the better of their revengeful desires: for a passion so importunate and clamorous in its demands, as revenge, if it cannot

not be curbed and controlled, cannot be suspended, and put off; and if it can be controlled, it can likewise be quelled and overcome.

As to the second set of men, viz. the men of passion and fury, they indeed will tell you, "God forgive them, it is their infirmity which they cannot help: they are apt to be transported into unseemly words and actions; but the storm is soon over." These are the excuses of those, who, when their anger has spent itself, are very good natured; and continue so, till fresh recruits of spirits enable their passions to take the field again; and they might serve well enough for those fierce animals, who must be held with chains and bridles, lest they fall upon you; but they come with a very ill grace from the mouths of those, who call themselves reasonable creatures. But the misfortune is, these notable excuses are quite spoiled, if we consider that these men can be, and are very often upon their guard. They will not fall into an unseemly rage before a great person, whom they dread and revere: nay they will recover themselves from a passion, and be recollected at the entrance of a stranger. Now what we can govern and restrain in the presence of a king or a superior; that we can certainly do, if we will, by an habitual consideration of the presence of the King of Kings; whose single inspection and observance ought to have a much greater influence upon us, than the most august assembly of men.

After all it must be owned, that a provocation may be so shocking and flagrant, that nature

ture may rebel against principle, and a desire of revenge may as naturally hurry away the soul, as a whirlwind does the body. This is an extraordinary case, and no doubt a gracious God will make allowances for it. But in all common cases, where we have power and leisure to rally our scattered thoughts, and to call in the succours of powerful reason and all-powerful grace; the duty of forgiveness, however distasteful to our corrupt nature, is far from being impracticable, if we take an hereafter into the account.

To exemplify this by a plain instance; suppose after some great injury received, a monarch, in countries where monarchs are invested with absolute power, should tell us, that if we breathed nothing but revenge, he would condemn us either to drag out a wretched life in slavery and woe, or to die a lingering death: but if we heartily forgave, and evidenced that forgiveness by some undissembled instances of good-will, he would heap upon us the most distinguishing marks of his favour: I desire to know who would not sacrifice his resentments, to embrace such advantageous proposals, and decline such exquisite torments? Now, the only potentate, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, has expressly told us, that *if we forgive not other people their trespasses, neither will he forgive us ours: but if we forgive we shall be forgiven.* Are then worldly advantages the only valuable considerations? May not the nobler views of recommending ourselves to our sovereign benefactor, an awful sense of his presence, and a fear of incurring

curing his displeasure, who is able eternally to *destroy both soul and body*, as effectually overcome our revenge; as the narrow prospect of lucre, or the impotent power of one, who is only able to kill the body? What we can restrain upon the account of temporal advantages, that we can certainly do upon more generous and forcible motives, if we allow them their due weight. It may be said, that these rewards and punishments are distant: but then the consideration of a short distance is infinitely overbalanced by the greatness of their degree, and the eternity of their duration: and a man must be perfectly good, or desperately abandoned, or impenetrably stupid, that is not alarmed at a full, serious and weighty consideration of eternity, an eternity of happiness or misery, when for ought he knows he may stand just on the brink of it; when at least within a short term of years he must be, according to his behaviour here, either eternally blessed with God, or for ever separated from all joy and peace.

That we are so often foiled in combating with certain passions, seems to be owing to this: some vices being very palatable and delightful, we care not to exert the whole force of the soul in opposition to what pleases, though it be of a pernicious consequence. We resist then, it is true, but it is *animâ malè pertinaci*, with a feeble treacherous half opposition; whereas did we set ourselves against vice, as we ought to cleave unto God, with *all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength*; we should soon find, that we thought that impossible, which

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to a determined mind is scarce difficult; and that we want not so much a sufficient ability to surmount the difficulties of a virtuous course of life, as a vigorous and animated resolution to exert it. It is a common saying, that few people know their own weakness; but it is as true a one, that few people know their own strength, till they are put to it, and resolved in the prosecution of any design. And the observation, that none ever pushed their capacity in matters of knowledge as far as it was able to extend; holds as true in matters of morality; that few or none ever exerted their abilities, as far as they were able to carry them, to the utmost stretch of their power, in the pursuit of virtue.

It has been often observed, that our hatred is most implacable, when it is most unjust; that the injurious person is more unwilling to hearken to any terms of accommodations, than even the injured. And we have a very apposite instance of this in Scripture. When Moses would have adjusted the difference between the two contending Israelites; he, that did the wrong, thrust him away, saying, *Who made thee a ruler or a judge over us?* Whether, or no, the injurious person suspects there can never be any hearty reconciliation, where wounds of deadly hatred have deeply pierced, and therefore thinks it a matter of policy, ever to persecute the man, whom he has once aggrieved; this is certain, that it is a torment to any man, that has not quite divested himself of all sentiments of humanity, to have even a casual interview with one, whom he has greatly wronged; it brings

to his mind those reflections upon his ill usage; which he would shun as well as the injured party, and he may say to his conscience, as well as to the man, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* On the other hand, the very sight of a person, whom we have lately obliged, gives a delicate pleasure.

IV. And lastly, To conclude with some practical advice.

Let us reflect, that we cannot expect to be benefited by our Saviour, as a full sacrifice for sin; unless we imitate him, as a complete model of virtue: and this we cannot do without forgiving and loving our enemies.

Consider likewise how ridiculous it is for beings to indulge their malice and enmity about little competitions of temporal interest, or trifles less than that; beings, that were designed to live above in an eternal friendship, in an everlasting harmony and union of minds, and in an uninterrupted circulation of mutual endearments.

We are all brethren, and why should there be occasion to advise us, as Joseph did his brethren, not to *fall out by the way*, when we are all travelling, or should be travelling to the same place, the spiritual Canaan?

Can a mind think any thing here worth an implacable animosity, whose comprehensive views are raised as high as heaven, and extended as far as eternity?

Let us think, what would become of us at the last decisive day, a day decisive of our eternal happiness or misery, if God should deal

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with us with the same unforgiving disposition, as we would deal with others.

If God *should be extreme to mark what is done amiss, who may abide it?* Yet man, weak man! who wants those allowances of mercy which he refuses to grant, will not charitably overlook one single fault, among a croud of considerable virtues.

Instead then of either breaking out into sudden bursts of passion, or contracting a sullen settled gloom of malice; let us turn the edge of our reflection upon ourselves, and consider, that, whatever offences others may have committed against God and ourselves, yet however like a paradox it may sound, the greatest offender within the compass of every man's knowledge is himself. For how many vain, foolish, wicked thoughts he has indulged, how many blessings he has been ungrateful to God for, how many opportunities to do good he has neglected, how many motions of God's grace, how many checks of his own conscience he has stifled and disregarded; how often fantastick cares have distracted, or vain pleasures have dissipated the attention of that busy, idle thing the soul, ever active and at work, but seldom active to any good purpose; this every man can only know as to himself. But whether others have had all the same advantages, whether they have harboured so many wicked thoughts and designs, whether their guilt be attended with every particular inflaming circumstance, that his is loaded with; this he can never be certain of except he could dive

into the secret springs of their actions, unravel the doublings and foldings of their nature, and be intimately present to whatever was transacted behind the curtain, within other people's breasts. Unless therefore man was, what God is alone, *the searcher of hearts*; he must conclude the greatest sinner he knows, is himself*.

You will say, such a man has committed a very flagrant sin, the imputation of which cannot be fastened on me. But how do you certainly know, but if he had enjoyed the same advantages of understanding, condition of life and education, the same assistance of God's grace, the same checks of his own conscience, and the same advice from others; he might have been so far from falling into that enormous sin, that he might have been much better than you? You then alone know the number, malignity and particular aggravations of your own sins; which should teach you to be candid and forgiving to others, whether they sin against God, themselves, or you; but to be severe, and inexorable to yourself: to let your censure and severity as well as your charity begin at home; and if your censure begins at home, it will find so much employment, that it will end at home too, which your charity ought not.

As the best writers are the most candid judges of the writings of others; so the best liver is the most charitable in the judg-

* See Law's Serious Call, p. 339.

ments they form of their neighbours actions.

Let us therefore put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man has a quarrel against any. Even as Christ forgave you : so also do ye.

S E R M O N XXII.

The Benefit of visiting our mourning Friends.

By the Rev. Mr. HOLLAND.

ECCLES. vii. 2.

*It is better to go to the house of Mourning, than
to go to the house of Feasting.*

IN the last verse of the preceding chapter, Solomon observes, that with regard to the outward circumstances of life, we know not what is the best for us. And in the beginning of the chapter he mentions several things, in their judgments of which, mankind in general are apt to mistake. To convince you, says he, that we are mostly ignorant of the comparative value of things, how many of us purchase pleasures at the expence of reputation. Though in truth a good name, with all the pains, that may be necessary to gain it, is better than precious ointment, that is, than the most exquisite gratifications of sense. Who
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does not esteem the birth of a man a joyful event, and his death a lamentable calamity? And yet the *day of his death*, if he be prepared for it, is happier to him than the *day of his birth*; since the one begins, and the other ends a state, in which he is exposed to numberless misfortunes. Again, which of us would not chuse to share in the joys and pleasures of a feast, rather than to visit a family, that is mourning for the late decease of some near relation? But here also we betray our folly: for *it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting*.

In the following discourse I shall endeavour to shew, that it is better to go *to the house of mourning*, than to go *to the house of feasting*, both as it is more laudable in itself, and more for our advantage and improvement. First, I suppose it will readily be allowed a more commendable act, to visit our friends in their distress, than to partake with them in their prosperity and pleasures. The laws of friendship evidently require, that, as we should be more desirous our friends should visit us in the happy, than in the sorrowful seasons of our lives; so on the other hand, we should be more forward to visit our friends, when they are oppressed with sorrow, than when they abound with joy.

Not, but that we ought to encrease the joys of our friends, by sharing in them upon proper occasions, as well as to lessen their griefs by our sympathy and consolation; but the latter is an office of much greater worth and im-

portance. Let us take it in the fairest light, of which it is capable. Suppose you go to a feast, not that you may indulge your sense, but that you may enjoy your Friends, and contribute to the good humour and improvement of the company: this indeed is far from being a bad end, considered by itself; and yet how indifferent and trifling does it appear, when compared to the raising a dejected soul, and reviving the heart of a disconsolate mourner? In the house of feasting it may be of little consequence, whether you are present or not; you need not doubt, but ease and chearfulness will be there, though you should be absent. But if you go to the house of mourning, you will probably alleviate those sorrows that overwhelm a whole family, and sink it in the most exquisite distress, of which human nature is capable.

That your presence may answer such valuable purposes, it is necessary you be moved with real kindness; for the mere formal visiter is rather a burden, than a relief to the mourner. Many also upon these occasions imprudently heighten the sorrows of their Friends, instead of assuaging them. They remind them only of such things, as tend to inflame their passion; and thus tear open afresh the wound that time was healing. While they are, or seem to be too deeply moved themselves, and indulge a weak effeminate sympathy, they add to the anguish of those, whom they ought to comfort. Such company does more harm than good, and is much worse than solitude itself. But if your visits of this kind are animated with
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real humanity, and conducted with prudence, they may be highly serviceable to your mourning Friends. Perhaps you may be so happy as to say something, that will moderate their Affliction. However, if you only shew them, you are solicitous to comfort them; this itself may go a great way towards gaining your end. They will possibly strive to conquer their sorrows out of regard for you, and assume some degree of chearfulness, lest by being obstinate in grief, they should seem to slight and reject your friendly endeavours. Nay, your very presence with them may yield them no small satisfaction, as it may convince them, that when death has deprived them of one friend, they have others left, who give them a fresh and no mean testimony of their esteem, by visiting them in adversity. These things have commonly such great force, that though some of the wisest men, that ever lived, have left us treatises of consolation, I make no doubt, but the converse of an intimate friend, who is affected with our concerns, and expresseth a desire to relieve us under them, is more supporting to the mind in such circumstances, than all the books of consolation that ever were written.

He is an imperfect friend indeed, who is fit only for the house of mirth, but useless at those melancholy seasons, when a friend is most wanted. We should therefore all of us examine ourselves, of what value we are to our Friends: and having taken due care to qualify ourselves for being serviceable to them, let us not neglect them

them in the time of their distress, nor leave them to pine away in solitary grief. On such occasions they have a right to compassion from all men; but something more is due from us, namely, that we use our best endeavours to prevent them from sinking under the weight of their sorrows, and restore them to a state of serenity and comfort. What visits of ceremony? what enjoyments of luxury? what conversation with those, that are at ease, though ever so delightful or improving, can we esteem comparable to the performance of these humane and charitable offices? But charitable and humane are low terms, when I am authorised to call them pious and sacred. St. James, when he is describing that religion, which is pure and undefiled in the sight of God, makes one half of it to consist in visiting, not the joyful and happy, but the fatherless and widows in affliction.

Thus in point of merit it is plainly *better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting*. Let us next consider in what respect it is more for our advantage. Some can hardly contain themselves from excess, when plenty is before them; and to such persons the house of feasting is the most dangerous place they can go to. But I will suppose, you can resist the strongest temptations to violate the laws of sobriety; and yet it is more for your advantage to visit those that mourn, upon various accounts. For first, by this means you will give your Friends a much more unquestionable evidence of your regard for them, and consequently gain
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more upon their affections, than by visiting them in the days of their prosperity and joy; this they may suspect you do for your own sake, but the other they will readily impute to your sincere kindness for them. Our Saviour has assured us, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive*; Acts xx. 35. to confer an obligation upon another, than to have one laid upon yourself.

Now when you partake at a feast, it may not be easy to determine, who is most obliged, you, or the person that entertains you. The favour is mutual at best; and I believe in most cases, an indifferent person would give it against you. But it is quite otherwise, when you go to comfort a mourning Friend; in this case the obligation lies only upon him, and you will scarce find him insensible of it. The undoubted kindness of your intention may perhaps go farther in binding him to you, than any thing you could do for him, in the more joyful seasons of his life. Hence the son of Syrach well adviseth, *Fail not to be with them that weep, and mourn with them that mourn, and be not slow to visit the sick; for these things shall make thee to be beloved*; beloved, not only by those you endeavour to comfort, but by as many as observe your friendship and humanity.

If you thus shew yourself willing to share in the griefs of your Friends, you will be the more welcome to partake of their joys. And it will dispose you to perform these benevolent offices, if you keep in mind the common condition of mortality. What happens
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to another may happen to you; and the next that must die, may be one of your best and dearest friends. God only knows, how soon death may enter your dwelling; how soon your house may become the house of mourning; how soon you may want consolation yourself. When this befalls you, it will be more for your advantage, to have others indebted to you in mourning than in feasting visits, that you may receive back the comforts you have bestowed. Whereas if you neglect your Friends in their sorrows, you will have little reason to complain, though you are destitute and forlorn, in the time of your adversity.

But the great objection to what I am now recommending, is, that if we associate with the sorrowful, we shall be infected with grief. Who would visit the house of mourning, which is overcast with darkness and gloom, the very entrance of which is enough to damp our spirits, and fill us with melancholy? At least, who is so fond of sorrow as to prefer this to the enjoyment of a feast, where pleasure and cheerfulness enlivens every heart, and are increased and heightened by a friendly communication? These are the sentiments of light and giddy minds, who never esteem themselves happy, except when they are dissolved in mirth and laughter. Such persons will hardly credit what I am going to say; that a serious and humane spirit, which can truly feel the affliction of a Friend, will find as true a satisfaction in sympathising with those that mourn, as in rejoicing with them that rejoice.

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Therefore, if you are incapable of sympathy, though the house of mourning may be dull and uncomfortable; yet if you have a lively sense of compassion, it will be quite the reverse. A sort of melancholy indeed will seize upon your spirit; but it will be a melancholy of a soft and a pleasing kind, which has nothing of gloom or dulness in it. There is a mixture of somewhat so agreeable in the tender sensations of humanity, as quite overbalanceth the sorrows, which it brings upon us: the mind is satisfied with itself, for being touched in this generous way; and enjoys (if I may so say) its own pain). A benevolent man, has a much more solid and manly pleasure, while the sacred tears of pity spring in his eyes, than the wanton fool in his gayest moments. We shall therefore but ill consult our own satisfaction, if we study either to suppress the motions of compassion, or to avoid the objects of it.

We should rather seek the society of the distressed, not only from a sense of duty, but also, that we may indulge ourselves in the generous pleasure of pitying and relieving them. To one, that has the heart of a man, what can be more delightful, than by his presence and conversation to give ease, and as it were life from the dead, to a disconsolate family? Such visits, whatever they are at the time, will not be the most unpleasant in the review. I am confident you will reflect with more satisfaction, upon the hours you consecrate to these pious offices, than upon the time you spend in feasting and mirth.

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But we should be concerned rather to improve, than to please our minds: rather to work in them the habits of virtues, which will be of lasting advantage to us, than to gratify our sense with transitory pleasures. Now in this respect it is much better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting, upon several accounts. For first, by conversing with the miserable, we shall exercise and strengthen the principle of humanity, which is one of the noblest affections of our nature, one of our most honourable distinctions from the brute creation. In a too easy and pleasant life, while we are neither disturbed by any afflictions of our own, nor attentive to the sorrows of our fellow-creatures, our hearts are apt to harden by degrees, till at last we contract a brutish insensibility. To prevent this, and to cherish within us that sense of compassion, which is the glory of our nature, it will be of great service to us, if we associate sometimes with the wretched, and set our pity at work by attending to their miseries. Next to our own sufferings, nothing tends so much to humanize and soften the temper, as frequently to observe the calamities and partake in the griefs of our fellow-creatures.

Another benefit arising from hence is; that, while we behold and pity the sorrows of others, we shall become better reconciled to our own condition. If we have experienced the like afflictions, it will afford us no small relief to see, that what has happened to us is only the common lot of mortals, and nothing but what

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all men are exposed to, as well as we, by the sovereign law and appointment of nature; to murmur against which would be equally impious and vain. If, on the other hand, God has hitherto spared our Friends to us, the tears of such, as are deprived of theirs, may help to give us a more lively sense of our own happiness, and quicken our gratitude to God, for continuing to us the enjoyment of our Friends. Thus we shall bring back more content than we had taken with us, which, it may be, is not always the case, when we come from a feast.

Nor let us be discouraged from visiting the house of mourning by the gloominess of the place, and the infectious nature of grief; a circumstance which ought rather to recommend it unto us, and shews it preferable to the house of feasting and mirth. For as a continual flow of joy and pleasure corrupts the mind, so it is not easy to say, how much good a little sadness of heart may sometimes do us. The former commonly produceth pride and levity, and makes us wanting in due regard both to God and man; but sorrow tames and humbles the mind, checks the wantonness of our passions; teacheth us to know ourselves, makes us thoughtful and considerate, and apt to conceive lively sentiments of pity and tenderness. Sorrow is the best nurse of wisdom, just thought, and good dispositions; and it is a great argument of our folly, that we are so careful to avoid what may in itself be so edifying to us; especially when virtue and friendship

ship call upon us to associate with it. Your mourning Friends may have too much of it already, so much as quite overcomes them, and drowns their spirits; perhaps, therefore, it would be alike advantageous to you and them, that you should taste of their bitter draught, and drive some of it into your own breast. Thus you may benefit yourself, and do them a real kindness at the same time. Upon other occasions you may possibly receive from your Friends, that which they can but ill spare, and which does you no considerable service; but, when you share in their sorrow, you take from them what is better, both for them to part with, and for you to have. It is pity, methinks, that visits, which are so gainful to both sides, should be neglected; while we enter so readily into a commerce of a different kind, which does not always turn out very profitable to either. Many a man has returned from a feast, worse than he went thither.

Though as to those feasts wherein insipid mirth and brutal pleasures are the principal entertainments, I am content to wave the advantage, I might take, by insisting upon them. Besides a well furnished table, let there be, if you will, perfect sobriety, innocent chearfulness, harmony of minds, pleasant and useful conversation; in short, whatever can recommend a feast to a wise and temperate man: still, I say, you cannot justly expect so much advantage from it, as you are likely to reap from a mourning visit. The one will be apt to excite and improve in your mind the best disposi-

dispositions, which will be a source of lasting happiness to you: as to the other, when a little time is past, the pleasure is gone; and if any benefit remains with you, it can arise only from the discourse, that has past; to balance which, it is well if you do not find in yourself a dissipation of thought, and a backwardness to return to the serious duties of life.

But lastly, the house of mourning is preferable to the house of feasting, because it is more apt to remind us of our own mortality. This is the argument, with which Solomon confirms the assertion of my text; for *that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart.* To think frequently of the great change, which is coming upon us, would have the happiest influence upon our minds. We should hardly be so fond of honours, fame and wealth, were we deeply sensible, how soon we must bid an eternal adieu to this world, and all its enjoyments. Outward possessions would seem not worth being proud of, when we have them ourselves; not worth an envious thought, when they belong to others; did we consider, as we ought, that both we and they must shortly die, and leave them behind us. Serious and habitual thoughts of dying, begetting in us a noble indifference to every thing else, would excite us to hasten our preparation for eternity, by cultivating in our minds the habits of virtue, and applying ourselves with diligence to the service of God and our generation. O that men were wise, that they understood this; that they would consider their latter end! Let

death, says one, be every day before thy eyes; and thou wilt never indulge a mean thought, nor desire any thing with too much eagerness.

Thus to meditate often upon our mortality, and lay it to heart, would be of unspeakable advantage to us. But, alas! we are very apt to forget, what, of all things in the world, it concerns us most to remember. Business, pleasures, feasts and diversions, fill our heads and leave no room for the thoughts of dying. How many of us spend one day after another, without once considering, that the day of life is drawing towards an end? or, if by some accident the idea of death comes uncalled, how many strive to banish it as soon as they can, like a troublesome guest, that interrupts their joy, and disturbs their repose? How few of us care to recollect often, that we are dying creatures? Since therefore the consideration of our own death is so profitable to us, and yet so seldom present to our minds, we should esteem that an happy circumstance, which will renew and leave with us the remembrance of it. Now the joys of a feast will be more likely to efface than revive such wholesome impressions; but in the house of mourning we shall hardly escape them. While we attend upon the funeral solemnity, and follow the corps of a departed friend to its long home, who is so stupid as not to consider, that he himself must shortly go the same way? Or when we are present in a house, where the footsteps of death are yet recent and fresh, we shall be drawn almost

most unavoidably into the like reflections. Upon the whole then, as nothing more directly and universally tends to make us better, than meditations upon our own death; so nothing is fitter to lead us into such meditations, than the visits we make to the house of mourning.

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S E R.

SERMON XXIII.

Funeral Consolations.

By the Rev. Mr. EMLYN.

Being the first Sermon preached by the Author
after the Death of his Wife.

JOHN xiv. 28.

*If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said I go
to the Father : for my Father is greater than I.*

I PRESUME it is unknown to very few of this assembly, under what mournful circumstances I now appear in this place ; or what that sorrowful occasion is, which in the choice of these words I have regard to, and which (by a due consideration of them) I desire to be relieved under.

The words are a very proper lenitive for assuaging the immoderate sorrow of Christians, upon the death of their lamented pious friends ; a time when nature melts into tears, overwhelmed with

with a swelling tide of grief, which is hardly kept within the bounds either of reason or of grace. Alas! when our withering gourds are smitten of God, especially if with a sudden and early stroke, we are ready to think with Jonah, *We do well to be angry, or to fret and pine*: on this grievous occasion we hear little else but the voice in Ramah, *Lamentation and weeping, Rachel weeping for her children (or friends) and refusing to be comforted, because they are not*. So that it must be a very powerful argument indeed that can charm the tumultuous spirit of a deep mourner into a calm moderation of his anguish.

And if there be any argument in the world sufficient in the case, no doubt but our Saviour has chosen it here, who urges his disciples with a mighty dissuative from too much grief; and this taken from that which was the very root and spring of it, viz. their unfeigned love to him.

The case was in short this: Our Lord Jesus was now about to die, and was taking his farewell of his disciples; *Yet, says he, a little while and ye shall not see me*; and again, *Whither I go ye cannot come*, John xiii. 33. Upon these melancholy tidings, their hearts were sore troubled: no wonder if they were loth to part with so kind a friend, or to lose so dear a master; such a wise guide and profitable teacher; especially since they were like to be left in a very forlorn case, as a poor naked prey to the rage and hatred of a blind and malicious generation. They seemed content to die along with him, if that

might be: *Why cannot I follow thee? I will lay down my life for thee,* John xiii. 37. was the language of one and all of them; but they could not bear the thoughts of a disconsolate separation.

Our Lord seeing them thus dejected, endeavours to cheer and hearten them, *Let not your hearts be troubled,* John xiv. 1. or don't take on and grieve so, but hearken to what I have to say for your consolation: and then he applies several arguments to this purpose, viz. from his design in going to *prepare a place,* where he and they might for ever live together; *I go to prepare a place for you; I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am there ye may be also,* John xiv. 3. A reviving consideration! that they should one day meet their dear friend again, and that their separation was to be but for a while. Well, but for all this, death makes such a vast distance between friends, and we know so little of another state, that the disciples seemed to doubt, whether ever they should meet again, if once they parted: they knew not whither he was going, nor the way to follow him: *Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?* ver. 5. In answer to this Christ tells them, he was the way, the truth, and the life; i. e. that the sure way to follow him to heaven, was by a due observance of his doctrine and precepts, as being the ambassador and representative of God to men, to deliver his mind on earth: for this he desires their belief, at least, if they would not take his word, they might be satisfied

satisfied from his works, which shewed the Father did dwell in him, ver. 11. Then he argues from the great advantage they would reap by his removing to heaven, to intercede for them, and to send down the Holy Spirit upon them.

But lest all this should not quiet them, he has one argument more in reserve in these words of my text, and that the most moving that can be; in which he desires them, if they loved him, that they would not so much mourn as rejoice at his departure; intimating that he would take it for a proof of their love to him, if they would mourn less. They thought, doubtless, they shewed love to him in grieving for his death; and it may seem strange, that Christ should put such a contrary interpretation upon their friendly sorrow, or should require so unnatural a thing of them, as to rejoice for his departure: what, (might they think) shall we rejoice at so amiable a friend's removal from us? Or can we be glad that we shall see his face here no more? No, it is impossible; we have no heart, no disposition to be glad in this sad season: therefore he adds a reason to back this great paradox, viz. because he was *going to the Father*; that is, to be rewarded and glorified by *him who was greater than himself*, and so was able to exalt him; which could not be without leaving them: therefore, says he, *if ye love me, ye should rejoice, because I told you I was going to the Father*. Hence I lay down this proposition:

That true love to our departed pious friends should prompt us to rejoice at their translation hence to heaven.

I know indeed there were peculiar reasons why the disciples should rejoice at Christ's departure to the Father, viz. because by it he should do them more beneficial service, than by his stay. *It is expedient, says he, that I go away: for if I go not, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you, John xvi. 7.* But these are not the motives our Lord Jesus argues from in the text; this were to argue from their own interest; or love to themselves; whereas he argues here from their pure love to him; supposing themselves were to receive no advantage, but present loss by his death, yet for his sake they should rejoice at his happiness in going to the Father. So that it is an argument as truly applicable to the case of any other holy friend's departure, when on our part there is real love and affection to them, as the spring; and on their part it can be said truly, that they go to the Father, as the ground and matter of this joy.

In speaking to this point, I shall, first, shew the meaning of our Saviour's words. Secondly, the force of his argument.

I. I shall consider the meaning of our Saviour in these words, both negatively and positively.

1. Negatively; (1.) It was not Christ's meaning by these words, to say, that there was no real love at the bottom of his disciples great sorrow for his death; or that there was no true love, where there was not visible joy on this occasion. That would have been an hard interpretation indeed of their friendly grief: they

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knew it was from love that their grief sprang; that if they had not loved much, they had sorrowed less: they were ready to make the appeal to him, *Thou knowest that we love thee.* Indeed he saw so much love in their sorrow, that it made him argue thus with them; *If, or feeling ye love me, &c. q. d. I see you love me, and expressing your tender affection to me by your mournful countenance and words, which shew your regret at my departure; since then love so prevails and works, let me argue with you from that prevailing passion without extinguishing or discouraging it; let me direct it into a right course, and then that love, which now makes you grieve, shall much more make you to rejoice.* He does not question, but supposes their love in these words.

In like manner, neither must it be said, that there is no love to our departed friends, whose decease we lament with a flood of tears: it is past the power of any man in the world to convince us of that; for we feel our love as plainly as we do our grief: and indeed our grief is nothing but our disappointed unsatisfied love; nay, it was from our Lord's own weeping over dead Lazarus, that it was said, *Behold how he loved him!* John xi. 36. It is love makes us feel the pain of an heart-rending separation between us and an amiable friend: it is love makes us miss the wonted desire of our eyes, its once so pleasant object: why else do men weep chiefly for relations and friends whom they love, if love do not influence grief?

(2.) Nor does our Lord intend to intimate, that all such sorrow for our holy friend's departure, is an unlawful or unbecoming expression of our love. Doubtless he was not displeased to see his disciples tenderly affected with his removal, and that he was like to die lamented of some. He, who shed tears at Lazarus's grave with sighs and deep groans, cannot be thought to forbid them wholly at his own: therefore he does not chide his disciples with angry reproaches, as though they were wholly in the wrong, but softly and tenderly reasons the matter with them in gentle persuasions, *Let not your hearts be troubled*, as rather pitying their sorrow than altogether condemning it. He who knows our frame will indulge the weakness of our frail natures a little in this thing, and will allow us to pay a small tribute of tears to the precious memory of an endeared friend; and to utter our parting farewell with an unusual accent of sorrow. Why should we not weep, when we are sure we shall see their faces no more? since for that very reason the Christians of Asia wept sore at St. Paul's leaving them; and they of Casarea on the prospect of his dying, (though somewhat remote) did weep, both to the breaking of their own hearts and his also, Acts xxi. 13. Indeed that same apostle, who seems to speak most against sorrow for the death of Christian friends, aims not at more than to make some abatement of the usual excesses of grief among the pagans. *Sorrow not as others, that have no hope*, 1 Thess. iv. 13. How that

was

was we may learn in Deut. xiv. 12. it was with violent rage, like madmen, under the tyranny of a passion, to whose excesses they abandoned themselves without check.

Especially where the relation is nearest, (I mean the conjugal) and the separation most violent, there God will permit us to shew the deeper resentment, because he allows greater affection. He that requires such love to the *wife of our bosom*, especially when the *wife of our youth* too, as to bid us, *Rejoice with the wife of thy youth, let her be as the loving hind, and pleasant roe; be thou ravished with her love always*, Prov. v. 18. Again, *Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved his church, Eph. v. 25. And again, So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies*, ver. 28. He, I say, knows well that so much love cannot (according to the make of human nature) but end in great grief at the dissolution of that near relation.

And though the antient patriarchs were men very renowned for their mortification to the comforts of this world, being truly pilgrims on the earth, yet methinks I find holy Jacob expressing such a sensible sorrow for the death of his Rachel many years after, as shews that wound was not yet quite healed to his dying day: *As for me*, says he, *when I came from Padanaram, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan by the way, when yet there was but a little way to Ephrath, and I buried her there*, Gen. xlviii. 7. He bemoans himself under the sense of his loss, *as for me*, or that which sticks by me, in a very sensible

sensible remembrance still; that which I am greatly concerned at, and cannot forget, &c. *as for me*, or as to my sorrowful part, *Rachel died by me*; and there I buried my greatest earthly delight. It is no unusual thing with good men, to lament under such circumstances: Ezekiel's case was particular, he was forbid to mourn for his wife, on purpose to amaze the people with his strange carriage, that they might ask the meaning of so monstrous and unusual a thing, as not to mourn for the taking away the desire of his eyes, Ezek. xxiv. 16, 21, 22. and it was to represent the greatness of their approaching calamity, that would be so great as to swallow up all private occasions of grief.

More especially may it quicken our sorrow, when we apprehend such a stroke to be the punishment of our iniquities, which withhold and withdraw good things from us; when we have reason to put that interpretation upon God's hand in the death of our dear relations, which she did on the death of her child, that it was *to bring our sins to remembrance*, 1 Kings xvii. 18. In this case grace falls in with nature, and by uniting the two streams the torrent of grief becomes the more violent: for who can look upon his dear friend, whom he has pierced and slain, and not mourn bitterly? But,

2. Positively, That which Christ intends here, is,

(1.) That at least his disciples should mix some joy with their sorrow for his death; he
does

does not say, *If ye loved me, ye would not grieve, but, ye would rejoice*; there should be some joy to allay and moderate their sorrow. And indeed as these two easily consist in the same breast, so there is a proper occasion for this mixture and confusion of our passions in the death of our pious friends; because in such dispensations, there is both a bright and cloudy side, the one in their gain, the other in our great loss; so that in the multitude of our troubled thoughts within us, there are comforts that may delight our souls, Psal. xciv. 19. and with David, we should have our hearts tuned to *sing of mercy and judgment* at once, Psal. ci. 1.

(2.) He intends to intimate, that their rejoicing should be more than their sorrow upon this occasion: for though he speaks not exclusively, in requiring them to rejoice, yet he speaks comparatively at least, that they should rather rejoice than mourn; joy should be our principal exercise, so that if it be enquired what our frame and carriage is under such a providence, it may be said we rather rejoice and triumph, than are dejected. True indeed, an external wanton mirth in jollity and laughter would be a monstrous deformity; but rational joy and satisfaction is a comely Christian temper, that well comports with the gravity of such an occasion.

(3.) He suggests further, that to rejoice on such occasions is the most regular and noble exercise of love to such departed friends; it is the most genuine and regular exercise of love, since the nature of love is to incline us to a joyful congratulation of the prosperity of its endeared object;

ject; and it is then it carries most evidences of love unfeigned, when we rejoice in our friends welfare, though no benefit (but rather damage) redounds to us thereby.

To say the truth, inordinate grief for the translation of a friend to heaven, is no proof at all of any love we bear to them, because it is not their loss affects us, but our own: so that all which can be said of us in justice is, that we love ourselves very well, whatever we do our friends; yes, much better than we love them, since our own lesser loss causes a trouble, which the thoughts of their much greater gain cannot ballance; so that we are liable to that reproachful challenge, *Is this thy kindness to thy friend?* Our cheerful satisfaction will better declare that.

And it is far the most noble, as well as most genuine exercise of love. It is a poor ordinary frame to mourn for our dead, as arising from mere sensitive nature: one needs no improvement of mind in order to this; there needs neither philosophy nor Christianity, virtue nor religion, to teach us this low lesson; but to rejoice in their happy change, to be glad that they are laid in a bed of everlasting rest, whilst we suffer the loss of their pleasant society, this is generous and truly noble love; this is such an ingenuous greatness of mind, as is only the product of divine faith and Christian hope, which regulates our love, and raises it to so high a pitch, as nothing below the grace of God and the light of the gospel can advance it to. So much for the explication.

II. I come next, under the second general head, to shew the force of our Saviour's reason, by which he justifies his inference, viz. that if they loved him, they would rejoice. Now the reason, on which he grounds this, is in these words, *Because I go to the Father, who is greater than I*; i. e. to one who could, and would exalt and reward him; q. d. I am going to be happy and glorious, to a blessed place, and blessed company, where I shall have no need of your pity or sorrow, and therefore on this consideration you should greatly abate it.

Now allowing for the difference in the glorious rewards and exaltation of our master, and of his servants, the reason may be extended to others, and has its force in the death of any pious friends; for they also go to the Father: the spirit goes to God who gave it, not only as the spirit of the wicked, viz. to be disposed of by him: but the holy Christian's spirit goes to him, as to his liberal rewarder, to see him, and enjoy him, to dwell and converse with him in that blessed acquaintance, which shall never be broken off to eternity; for they go to the same place with their Saviour, *where I am, there shall ye also be*, and shall have a mansion in the same Father's house. John xiv. 3.

Now let us consider what there is implied in all this, that should raise joy upon the departure of our holy friends in all that rightly love them. Now there are three arguments or grounds of joy which arise hence.

1. This implies that our pious and dear friends, though dead, are not utterly extinct

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and lost; for they only go to the Father: they pass from one place and company to another, but are not sunk into the black abyss of non-existence. It was but a slender consolation, which the heathen philosophers oft offered to their mourners, in telling them, that though dead men enjoy no good, yet neither do they feel any evil. Indeed, supposing them lost in an utter extinction, 'tis all the comfort we have left concerning the best men; whereas we can only allow that to be true of the body; this having lost the active animating principle, is neither miserable nor happy; now like an useless idol, it has eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear, and feet but cannot walk; it has lost its beautiful air and regular motions, and all its sensations of pleasure and pain. But we believe better than so of the invisible principle, that this has still the pleasure of life and activity about nobler objects: that immortal tenant is only removed from a crazy cottage of clay to a more excellent dwelling *not made with hands*. This indeed is better tidings than what sense reports; that represents them as lost for ever, but faith tells us, they are but translated; the one says, Joseph is utterly devoured by an evil beast, and now is not; by the other we understand he is safe and well in another land. This is so mighty a lenitive to our grief (which we owe chiefly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ) that the apostle sticks not to say, that *he has even abolished death* by making this discovery of a future life, 2 Tim. i. 10. Here then is matter of joy to think that our friends are not perished in the frightful

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shipwreck; but as we have sometimes seen the same boisterous waves, that break the vessel, do but waft the passenger over to the safe shore, so death has landed them safe on another coast, whose frail bodily vessel is dashed in pieces. No wonder if Rachel refuse to be comforted, if she think her dead children are not in being; but blessed be God, it is not so, for all, even the dead live to God, though not with us; they live, yea, and they act, and think, and love more busily than ever, Luke xx. 38.

It is with them as with the sun, who at evening leaves our horizon under disconsolate darkness; and some very foolish persons may think its glory buried and extinguished, when it is only gone to the other hemisphere, and there shines with as much beauty and brightness as ever. Methinks this consideration should make us say as old Jacob, when on good tidings of Joseph's welfare he began to revive, *It is enough, he (or she) is alive*, Gen. xlv. 28. It is enough to put us into a transport of joy, to read what our blessed Lord said for the support of Martha, when grieved for her brother Lazarus's death, *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die*, John xi. 25, 26. Well then, we learn from our Saviour's argument here, that the surviving Christian has this to say for his comfort, that his dead friends are not rased out of being; they have shot the gulph, but are not lost in it. Be not then terrified at their death;

it has killed the body, but could not kill the soul.

2. This consideration that they *are gone to the Father* implies, that they are unspeakably more happy, where they now are, than they were, or would have been, if they had continued here. This Christ plainly intends in the words, viz. that he should change *for the better*. It is better being with God above, than with their friends on earth: because,

1. They are hereby delivered from our (and once their) troubles. They, who pass out of our Egypt, do certainly go out of a place of great bondage, and shake off a mighty load of cares and fears, and many uneasy burdens, which being in this tabernacle they groaned under. The occasions of grief here are so many, either originally, or by sympathy our own, that of most who are departed hence may that account be given, *These are they, who came out of great tribulation*: they are gone off from the accursed earth, doomed to bear briers and thorns to the torment of man. Their life was but a tragedy filled with sighs and groans, not counterfeit but real; how many provocations to grief or anger filled their eyes with tears, and their mouths with complaints? One while crying with the Shunamite's child, *My head! my head!* and anon with the prophet, *O my bowels! my bowels! I am pained at my very heart*, Jer. iv. 19.

But now there are no thorns in the flesh to disquiet them; they are no longer harrassed with painful diseases or feeble sickness, with faintings or weariness, or with ungrateful remedies,

that could neither prevent the frequent alarms, nor the one fatal stroke of death. Nay, 'tis a great part of their deliverance, that they have now no frightful views of approaching dreadful death; the king of terrors, with his train of black attendants, will return to them no more; they are got out of his dominion, they have felt his sting, they have shot the amazing gulph, have no more dying groans and sobs to fetch, nor parting agonies to fear, which terrify us mortals, who have that conflict yet to go through. These melancholy things with them are over and past; now the weary body is at rest in its bed; the grave is a quiet sleeping place, where all is hush and still, peace and silence; *the clods of that valley are sweet unto them*, Job xxi. 33. There they have found a quiet harbour, where they have unladen all their burdens and sorrows; there they have buried their cares and anxieties; there they have lodged an aching head, or tortured bowels, or pained limbs; that was the goal, at which their wearisome race and pilgrimage had its happy end.

Nor are they liable now to those spiritual sorrows, which once disquieted their tender souls; they have no doubts of the love of God, for they know and feel it abundantly; no more an aching heart about their eternal condition, saying, *What shall I do to be saved?* for they have heard, *Well done good and faithful servant, enter into thy Master's joy.* They have no more despondent suspicion of their own sincerity towards God, no lamented indispositions to his holy service, no spots nor wrinkles to render

them a shame or burden to themselves; they fetch no more such deep sighs as that, *Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!* Rom. vii. 24. They have no more such bitter challenges as those, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why so disquieted within me?* Psal. xlii. 11. They are satisfied with God's likeness.

They see no abominations in that holy land, to cause them to sigh and mourn; the evil serpent enters not their paradise, to tempt any to sin: their righteous souls are not vexed with seeing or hearing any filthy or miserable thing: no groans of the oppressed, nor cries of the persecuted; no tragical relations from our Acel-dama; no reports of this great slaughter, and that mighty desolation, which make up the history of this earth, and gain the applauses of the theatre; no such doleful tidings, nor mournful spectacles disturb their quiet felicity.

Much less are they grieved for those consequences of their death, that now trouble us; it grieves not them that they have quitted our world or company; they are not sorry they have left their worldly possessions and estates, that the pleasant places of their habitation must know them no more; it wounds not them, that they have left their once dearest friends in mournful sorrow, crying after them, *My father! my father!* 2 Kings ii. 12. It troubles not them, that their once so beloved offspring are become exposed orphans in the world; no, as *their sons may come to honour, and they know it not; so may they be brought low, and they perceive it not,*
Job

Job xiv. 21. They mind not these petty troubles of ours; it grieves not them (however it may us) that their comely countenance is turned to ghastliness and deformity, and their flesh become an habitation of worms, that once had a more noble inhabitant; they are not moved at lying in the dark and solitary vault among the dead, nor at the gnawing of those worms that will die. We mention these things, or ruminate upon them with melancholy thoughts, but so do not they.

Nor have they any other sorrows in exchange for these of the lower world; no, they have no more any pain, or sorrow, or crying; *they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, &c.* Rev. xxi. 4. *For the Lamb shall feed them, and lead them to the fountain of living waters; and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes,* chap. vii. 16, 17. In a word, 'tis their jubilee, 'tis the year of their eternal release from all evil, in which they have not only cast off their bonds and fetters, but have also put off their armour; have laid by the *shield of faith* and *helmet of hope*, and are sat down in everlasting perfect peace, in the *land of praise and joy*, into which they have carried no discordant complaints. Is not this a great motive to our joy, when they are gone? Why should we grieve much for them, who grieve not at all themselves? Or why should rivers of tears run down our eyes, when God has wiped away all tears from theirs for ever?

2. By going to the Father they enter into exceeding great joy; they have not only left Egypt, but they have got into the good land of

promise: they have not indeed all the felicity intended for them; there are some ornaments and glories, which they must not put on nor wear till the *marriage-day of the Lamb*; but yet the lines are fallen to them in pleasant places, and they have already a goodly heritage; enough to warrant us to say, that *henceforth they are blessed*, because some reward of their works has followed them at present, Rev. xiv. 13. They are gone into their Father's house, to their best and dearest friend; he, who at their penitent return to him, (when they said, *I will go to my Father, &c.* Luke xv.) was so ready to meet them with compassionate embraces, to call for *the ring and fatted calf*; and to assure them of his gracious acceptance on earth, has doubtless with inexpressible kindness welcomed them to their everlasting home. He who before gave them the earnest, has now given part of the inheritance; in his good pleasure he has given them the kingdom; their Master has bid them *enter into his joy*, and they have put on the *garments of praise, for the spirit of heaviness*.

They are gone to a blessed place, to a paradise of eternal delights; are got nearer to the heaven of heavens, the royal palace of the king of glory, where the high and lofty one dwells in inaccessible light, and fills that temple with his magnificent train; where he has erected a throne, on which infinite Majesty for ever resides, at whose dazzling brightness the seraphim hide their faces, and pay their homage with the greatest veneration; where infinite beauty unveils its face to open view, where it amazes, ravishes,

vilhes, and overcomes myriads of attentive spectators; its attractive charms draw and fasten all their eyes so, that they never look off from that *amiable object*, they always behold him, *Mat. xviii. 10.* where they need no books of devotion to warm their hearts; one view of his ineffable glory is instead of a thousand arguments, and wraps them up in the flames of ardent admiring love.

They are gone to blessed company, where all are most holy, most wise, good and happy; a society made up of the choicest and most excellent of the earth, whom God has been gathering together out of all the generations past, and has made much more excellent than they were, all of them kings and priests, and sons of God; all knit together in the indissoluble bands of truest love, which is ever cherished by the engaging charms of intimate endearing converse; so that they are dearer to each other than ever our friends were to us, or we to them on earth. Oh! what a surprising change is this to them, who from a world made desolate by prevailing rage and malignity, find themselves got into the very element of love! How then can it be but well with them! for they are gone to *Mount Sion, the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, Heb. xii. 22, 23.* They are with the Redeemer in his kingdom, and in a noble consort of spirits sing the song of Moses and the

Lamb, *Hallelujah, salvation and glory to our God.* They, blessed souls, have all their wants supplied, all their needful desires satisfied, and their hopes fulfilled or well secured? They inherit all things, for God is their portion for ever: him they now see and know in clear light, and if their faith did not satisfy them, their sight now does, which has cured all their deadness and coldness toward him, and has set all right for ever.

They are gone to a state of perfect knowledge and unstained purity: they are in a near conjunction with the father of lights, that eternal fountain of all truth; from him their elevated understandings receive those vigorous rays of divine wisdom, which do both beautify and refresh; the greatest philosophers, who have made the most successful essays upon all the theories of nature, nay, Solomon himself, who had wisdom enough to reach from the *cedar in Lebanon to the byssop on the wall*, in all the glory of his wisdom was not like to one of these; he that is least in that kingdom above, is greater than he; there they are, truly, as wise as the angels of God; all their imperfect partial knowledge is done away, because *that which is perfect is come*. They have found the way out of those labyrinths, in which we are mazed and lost; and found their joyful *εὐρηκα*, over a thousand doubts and difficulties, which after all our laborious disquisitions, do pose and confound us mortals: they have found the happy way of increasing knowledge without increasing sorrow. How many doubts are with them resolved!

James I

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how many mistakes corrected! how many unknown secrets revealed! O glorious and ample prospect, that from the mount Moriah, the mount of vision, has opened itself to their clear and satisfying view? Truly their light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing to behold it.

No less is the pleasure of their perfect holiness, or the exercise of their consummate love. There is even now a very sweet relish in the exercises of a devout mind, while with David he is but *panting after God, as the hart after the water-brooks*; the soul feels an hidden pleasure in that divine warmth; it is marrow and fatness to it, and renders a day in God's courts *better than a thousand*: but it is a much more noble thing to love as those blessed do, who enjoy and see the God of love, and clasp about that infinite eternal good with the brightest flames of ardent unwearied zeal. How delightful is it to exercise that love in high admirations, and to give it vent in the transports of endless praises! How pleasant to serve so endeared an object, with a mind cured of all its infirmities, and disentangled from all impediments! And above all, how satisfying to behold in themselves so lively a conformity to him, whose matchless excellencies have so many myriads of delightful admirers!

And is not here great reason why we should rejoice for them? does not love teach us to be glad at our friend's felicity? Oh, my brethren, can we indeed with seriousness contemplate the heavenly glory of the saints, so amazing, so unspeakable glory, and not be transported to think

think and hope, that our beloved dear friends are there? Sure, if with St. Paul we had ever been taken up into the third heaven, and had heard his *Ἀποκρυφισμὰ*, things not to be uttered; or if, with St. John, we had in vision surveyed the New Jerusalem in all its glory, and heard the charming melody of the hallelujahs sung in her streets; or had ever beheld triumphant saints walking in white robes with palms in their hands; I say, sure we should be ashamed to weep for them who are there. Look up, Christians, and see if these be objects of lamentation. What! they that have a paradise to dwell in, that have a kingdom to enrich them, that have angels to converse with, and an infinite God to enjoy! are these to be consoled! No, no, the more we loved them, the more we shall rejoice, because it is so very well with them. Would we indeed recal them from all this bliss and joy unto a partnership of our tears and groans, our sins and darkness? What! from the possession of all those great things, beyond what our *eye ever saw, or heart conceived*, but yet their eyes do see, and their hearts do rejoice in? Have we such a grief as would dispossess our friends of heaven? Verily, whatever we pretend, this is not from real love, for that principle is not so injurious.

When they were on earth, they oft wished for a release from this vain life; had they had *wings as a dove*, they had flown away sooner, and been at rest. They oft went up to mount Pisgah, as Moses, and gave many a longing look towards the promised land; desires
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and groans were the harbingers they sent before their arrival; and now that they have obtained their wishes, we ought rather to congratulate than bewail them; but by no means to wish them back again into the estate that was once so uneasy to them.

We have no reason to think that they look back in their hearts to our Egypt, for we ourselves find many temptations to desire a discharge, and be gone; and should we be so unkind to our delivered friends, as to wish them a burden, which ourselves would fain throw off?

The truth, in short, is, we quite forget whither they are gone (either through unbelief or inconsideration) and so, like Jacob, we mourn for Joseph as lost, when at the same time he is lord over all Egypt; or we think of them only with relation to ourselves, and our want of them, without a regard to their good, else it would not be so hard to rejoice for them: for why should we lament their great deliverance? or, why should we hang our harps on the mournful willow, when they have taken theirs into their hands in the joyful choir of blessed spirits?

This consideration, that *they are gone to the Father*, affords us another ground of joy, in that they are gone to the same place, where we ourselves (if such as they) are hastening to. This is what Christ intimated more than once to his disciples, John xiv. 3. that they shortly should go to the same place, and same Father, to possess the mansions prepared for them in his great house:

house: and here it was, that their love might find matter of great joy. It is the separation of our friends from us that grieves us; that we and they must divide into such a distance, as admits no more sweet and delightful converses: we are ready to say with Thomas, *Let us also go, that we may die with him*, John xi. 16. or with Ruth to Naomi, *Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried*; Ruth i. 17. as being loth to be parted by death itself. Let us but have their amiable society, whatever it costs us: this our desire is in great measure granted; God will indeed remove them from us, but then it is to that country and city, where we ourselves design to settle for ever. They are gone, but 'tis to the same harbour, which we are bound to, and are upon our voyage for; nay, where we ourselves have already cast anchor by a stedfast hope, though we are not yet landed, as they are. Do we not profess ourselves to be pilgrims on this earth, and that heaven is our only home? Is it not your real hope, that you shall one day take up your rest in that city of God? If so, whither then could we wish our friends to be gone but where they are! Would we not have them to be there, where we may hope to find them again? We are leaving this world ourselves, and if they leave it not too, how should we hope to dwell together again? Were they always to have continued here, we could not have staid to enjoy them long; but where they are we hope to find them again, and to enjoy them for ever. That is the place, to which God the great arbiter of our lot has adjourned

adjourned our next meeting, where there are mansions (not tabernacles) enough; one for Moses, one for Elias, and another for us, I mean for our holy friends and ourselves too, which our common master has prepared.

We have this then to comfort us, that we know whither they are gone, and the way we know to follow them; so that there is nothing else to trouble us, but only that we removed not together: and yet if we and they were in a foreign country on earth, how easily could we send them home some weeks before us, and be glad to hear of their safe arrival? It is much the same case, when they go to God before us, while we are following them; so that we are hoping heaven shall bring us together again: there we shall soon meet our dear and pious relations, like the meeting of Joseph and his brethren in Pharaoh's court, with joy and love enough; we shall surely find them somewhere among the multitudes coming either East or West, Luke xiii. 29. to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God, whither ourselves hope to be admitted: and this ought to revive our hearts, as something like it did very much affect the * heathen orator, when he cried out as one in an extasy, *O! præclarum diem!* &c. "Oh! glorious day indeed, when I shall come to that assembly of divine spirits!" If a pagan could with so lofty a rapture think and speak of that blessed day, when he expected to meet with the souls of the famous heroes and wise philosophers,

* Cicero.

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(when yet his expectation was only supported by probable conjecture) how much more should it elevate the heart of an assured Christian into the warmest transport of gladness, to think of that day, when he shall meet with the patriarchs and prophets, and all the members of the church of the first-born, and his own endeared friends among them?

And the rather, because that last mentioned text seems to suppose a particular knowledge, who those blessed are that we shall then converse with, and what relations they stood in this present world; for if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob shall be then so distinctly known, why not others also? And if they are known to others, surely, it is known to themselves, that they were grandfather, father, and son, who once dwelt together, as heirs of the promise in the same tabernacles on earth; no knowledge nor love shall be lost, but what is imperfect and useless.

We shall not, perhaps carry with us any sensitive ideas of face or features into another world, but shall probably put off these with the body, because they seem useless, since there will be no counterpart of these to answer them, by which to know our friends again in that world; no, not at the resurrection itself; for their bodies will be then wonderfully transformed, not to be known by what they were formerly on earth, in their vile condition: I only say this is probable, because I will not pretend to certainty in so dark a case, or to see into the shadow of death; for I know not what subtle vehicle, or
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fine clothing the soul may carry away from the body, according to many philosophers both Pagan and Christian; nor whether those vehicles have organs of sight, or be objects thereof, nor what figures they will have, nor what ideas or memory we shall retain of past objects to compare them by; but yet I see not what warrant that antient Christian writer Irenæus had to assert, that "separate souls carry the likeness and figure of their bodies, so that they may be still known thereby in another world." However we may justly hope for a knowledge of them some other way, by revelation, information, or mutual discourse, &c. "I must profess from the experience of my soul," (says the excellent Mr. Baxter) that it is my belief that I shall love my friends in heaven, that principally kindles my love to them on earth; and if I thought I should never know them more, and consequently not love them after death, I should now love them comparatively little, as I do other transitory things, but now I converse with them with delight, as believing I shall converse with them for ever." No doubt but they who dwell together here, as heirs of the same grace of life, joining their prayers, shall dwell together there, as joint inheritors of that life, joining their praises. Some not unfitly compare the saints of all ages to a fleet of mariners, all bound for the same port, though some arrive sooner, and some later; and they, who have been first there, welcome those that come afterward with joy and great affection: and what though

though our friends have outlived us? it is likely we may come in with the next fleet, and meet at home, and then our love will be satisfied again. Perhaps, ere it be long we may mingle our own ashes with their beloved dust; however that be, our souls hope to join in the same choir, and work with theirs for ever, and therefore should rejoice now in this hope.

True indeed, we shall no more know them after the flesh, in the relation they once stood in this world: there shall be no more *marriage, nor giving in marriage*, Luke xx. 35. except it be the marriage of the Lamb, which they are waiting for, and for which *the Lamb's wife is making herself ready*, Rev. xix. 7. Why not we, my brethren, not we, but Jesus Christ himself shall be their glorious everlasting bridegroom! And as the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, *so will he rejoice over them!* Isa. lxii. 5. Therefore it should greatly pacify us, as it did David, to say, *We shall go to them*: which is much better than their return to us: *They have departed from us for a season, that we might receive them again for ever.*

I may add, that this is the most effectual consideration in the world, from whence an affectionate mourner can receive full satisfaction; because it rather supports than suppresses his love to his deceased friend: true love, above all things, has a strong principle of self-preservation; it resists all things that would extinguish it, and abhors forgetfulness; no waters can quench it, it is stronger than death, and will survive its object. Now this consideration of
seeing

seeing them again relieves and revives our love; it tells us, we may cherish and keep it still, and that it shall have a fresh gratification in the presence of its restored object; we may love on upon a just ground, and may anticipate the pleasures of that eternal society with our dear friends expected above. So that upon this account, in midst of our anguish, we may imagine the angel's address to the disciples to be (with some alteration) made to us, *Why gaze ye so, and stand looking after them who are ascended? These same persons, who are taken up from you into heaven, shall ye see coming again.* Oh! that we could, like Abraham, by faith so see that day, though far off, as to rejoice! This is the way to perpetuate our memory of them, when they return with delight on our minds, and not as a frightful torment. If there be nothing but sadness and terror, it will soon weary us, and make us study some arts of oblivion, whereas we shall very freely repeat a grateful and welcome remembrance.

The useful inferences from this doctrine are as follow:

1. This shews us the excellency of Christianity, or how great a blessing the gospel is; which furnishes us with such an antidote against these temptations to deep sorrow. Indeed it is a comfortable doctrine, which brings life and immortality to light! which tells us they are but sleeping in Jesus, who have died in him, and helps us to put so mild an interpretation on so grievous a calamity. What a soft notion of dying is this, viz. *A going to the Father*, our gracious, compassionate, heavenly Father! What-

ever dubious glances this way we find among some of the sagacious heathen writers, who confess they rather desired, than were able to prove it (as Seneca owns) 'tis certain, they had so little of an assured persuasion of eternal bliss after death, prevailing among them, that the apostle (in this respect opposing them to Christians) sticks not to describe them thus, viz. *those who have no hope*, 1 Theff. iv. 13. but where they had no clear hope, Christians have perfect assurance.

And whereas we are apt to be concerned for the outward tabernacle, those amiable bodies that were the desire of our eyes, and the instruments of conversation, whose very pleasing idea makes many a welcome return to our grieved minds, and which we love to cherish and preserve in a lively remembrance, the Gospel answers this also, though it will be but of little consideration with wise men; for what are these lumps of clay without the animating principle more to be valued than the comely garments of a beautiful person? The soul was the true subject of those excellent and sweet dispositions, for which we once so admired them.

And yet even this flesh rests in hope of a blessed resurrection; the great Redeemer is the guardian of their dust; for *this is the Father's will which sent him, that of all which was given him he should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day*, John vi. 39. Nay, he *will exchange their vile bodies, and will fashion them like to his own glorious body*, Phil. iii. 21. He will one day visit their sepulchres with mighty power,

power, when his spirit shall enter those dry bones, and make them to live. He will bring their separated spirits out of that state of widowhood, and reunite them to the body; but not such a corruptible body as we saw them here. We knew them *in weakness* and frailty, but he will raise them *in power*, 1 Cor. xv. 43. We knew them *in dishonour* base and vile; but he will raise them *in glory*. We knew it a *natural* or sensual body, but he will raise it a *spiritual*: it had not the glory of a *star* here, but then it shall have the beauty and brightness of the *sun*, Mat. xiii. 43. O sweet contemplation to think how that corruptible shall put on incorruption, and that mortal so beloved shall put on immortality! And therefore we do not throw them away carelessly, as things never to be looked after more, but we lay them up in the safe repository of the grave with solemnity and care, as a treasure in store; *Because the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall bear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth and live*, John v. 28. and then some use will be made of these deposited remains.

And is this the account the Gospel gives of them, who die in the Lord! Is this the case of our deceased holy friends? Then, *O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?* Thanks be to God for this Gospel; that we and our friends have lived under it, and can die more easily for it. Oh! what a black gulph is death both to the dying and surviving friend, when they see nothing certain beyond the grave and dry bones! but to Christians, who see it shine beyond the clouds, there is

comfort! there is hope! We part a while, but it is as they who bid good-night, only for a little interval of rest. Thus has the Gospel abolished and quite annulled death.

2. How much more may a well-prepared Christian rejoice in his own death, because he has a far greater concern in its advantages than his loving friends! Indeed death is so solemn a business, so important a crisis, the turning point of eternal happiness, or eternal misery, that leads to a judgment so accurate and searching, (the requisite preparation for which is so strict, and human frailties so many) the doom is so dreadful, and the sentence so decisive and irreversible, that no frame is more befitting or safe for poor sinful creatures to be found in, than that of a penitent humility, and a serious awful anxiety about the issue of so momentous a concern.

But when a Christian hath deliberately settled the grounds of his hope, and upon impartial search finds the characters of an heir of glory, and the uncorrupted testimony of his conscience concerning his integrity of heart and life; why should he not rejoice with his trembling, even when he is stepping over the border of time into a boundless eternity? Sure it should be a joyful thing to die and go to the Father! And no doubt but it would be so, if he were certain of that; they who are through humble jealousy apt to cry, *Lord, spare us a little*, would then welcome death with speed. As for a well-prepared and assured Christian, who knows, if he were absent from the body, *he should be present with the Lord*; how can he but desire it?

Why should he, like others, be hanging back and craving more delay? Why should he loiter, when a messenger from heaven calls him out of this Sodom? Rather, he ought to desire to be dissolved, ἀναλῦσαι, to loose from this port, and to go with full sails into the *haven of eternal rest*. It is indeed a rough passage, in which he is sure of the shipwreck of the earthly vessel; but the soul shall land safe in paradise. It is a dark step through the valley of death's shadow, but he is led through it by a sure guide, who will shew him *the path of life*, Plal. xvi. 11. why then should he fear any ill? Rather let him say as Zuinglius, when he received the mortal wound, *Ecquid hoc infortunii?* "What harm is this to me?" Indeed nature shrinks and shivers at the thoughts of untried agonies and groans, which we have sometimes seen others labour under. But what though it cost us a few sighs and pangs, who would not break his way through one half hour's pangs into everlasting joys, to have that great sight, viz. the presence of the *God of glory*? This is enough to make the Christian at once both to fight and triumph, while he bids his sorrowful friends rejoice, *because he goes to the Father*.

But, alas, it is astonishing to see how little of this holy welcome death finds amongst Christians! I doubt the most that the generality of men, esteemed religious, attain to, is only to be unwillingly content with heaven, when ungrateful death will no longer suffer them to stay. How few court his approaches in calm desires! when they have suffered an unwelcome ship-

wreck, they are content indeed to land on the celestial shore, rather than perish; but they had much rather put off the voyage. When therefore they are arrested with sickness or danger, what do we hear, but craving more delay, hanging back, and crying, *Lord, spare me a little longer?* Where do we find the spirit of those pilgrims, who having heaven in their eye, embraced the promise with joyful arms, and with insatiable desires hastened to arrive there? They valued not their own country; ever since they heard of heaven, they would hear of no home on earth. Where are these children of Abraham, these seed of Jacob, that stand so affected towards heaven, as to rejoice in quitting their kindred and native earth at God's call? Heb. xi. 13, 16. And how should our friends rejoice for us, in what is so unwelcome to ourselves? Let us not act so inconsistently with our principles, as to extol the felicity of our departed Christian friends, and yet be so averse to have their lot. Can we rejoice for them, and yet bemoan ourselves under the same fate? Or is it so well for them, and can it be ill for us *to go to the Father?* Nay, our desires should be so much the greater, because our dear Lord is gone before, and so many of our holy friends also. The departure of every amiable relation or friend to heaven is a fresh invitation to our desires to follow, since it is at once to go both to *the Father*, and to them too, which we perhaps have more sensible conceptions of. Were our friends in hell with Dives, the Scripture tells us they would have entreated us not to come to that *place of torment;*

torment; but being in paradise, no doubt, they as earnestly wish us a share in their joys; and shall not our desires be the same? Let us learn then to converse with death as a friendly thing, which, as the philosopher said of his enemy, may kill us but cannot hurt us. We know where, and to whom it sends the good man; it makes him *absent from the body*, but *present with the Lord*: an exchange, to which he should be most willing!

3. Let this give a check to our inordinate grief for the death of holy friends. Here is the difficulty to put this in practice in a time of trial: our love is usually so carnal and sensual, that we know not how to raise it to so rational and spiritual an exercise as this. When death has unclasped those mutual embraces of our friends and us, (which nothing but death could do) our passions are soon in such a tumult as David's: *Oh! my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom: would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son!* 2 Sam. xviii. 33. It is a time when our bowels will sound like a harp within us; when nature can frame itself to no voice but that of lamentation and weeping, and we refuse to be comforted: we cannot forbear Jacob's sorrowful moan, *Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and all these things are against me!* Gen. xxxii. 36. We have much ado to restrain ourselves from David's passionate exclamation, *I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been to me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women,*

2 Sam. i. 26. We can hardly suppress our inward wishes with Job, *Oh! that it were with me as in months past, when my children were about me!* Job xxix. 2, 5. This then is the time when we have need to call in all the aids of our Christian faith and hope, for calming our disquieted minds: and surely these should signify something with Christians. To what purpose have we the revelation of immortal life, if it be of no use on such occasions? Why have we more hope than others, if we have not less sorrow? Make not the world believe you think so meanly of heaven, by mourning for those who are gone thither, as though this world were better. Rebuke these unreasonable passions; it is their birth-day into glory; though there was sorrow when *the hour of travail came*, (when we saw our beloved friends in their pangs and agonies, when we saw pale death changing their countenances, and sending them away; then we stood round them with sorrow and tears, as if we shared in their agonies, and died with them;) yet now that they are delivered, and remember their anguish no more, we should carry it as sharers in their joy, and believing admirers of their felicity: thus David washed and anointed himself, when it was said, *The child is dead*. Philo the Jew tells us, that the great veneration which the Hittites expressed to Abraham in that honourable salutation, *Thou art a mighty prince*, &c. Gen. xxiii. 6. was because they saw him bear the death of his wife Sarah with more magnanimity and moderation, than was usual among them.

Philo-

Philosophy itself has often laid these storms, and taught the wise Pagans to triumph over these infirmities of nature; and shall Christianity be baffled with them? Plutarch tells us of his wife, that when tidings met him on the road that his son was dead, and the company with him came home, they saw all things so serene and easy, that they concluded it was a false report, so calmly and indifferently had she managed herself. Nay, the poor barbarous Americans will sing over the remains of their friends, who they believe are gone to the region of spirits, while they recount with joy the little instances of their valour: and shall not we with more reason rejoice over ours, while we rehearse the evidences of their piety, and the fruits of their faith, and charity, and victory over the world? It is * Seneca's supposition (and may be our firm conclusion) of a good man, *Fortasse quem nos periisse putamus, præmissus est*; He is not lost at death, but only is sent before.

Upon how little a business of this life do we contentedly and patiently part from our dear associates for some weeks or months? and it suffices us to hear they are well, though absent: and shall we take it so very ill, when they are gone (perhaps not much longer) upon so great a business as taking possession of an everlasting kingdom? Can we love them, and not wish their happiness? Or can they be happy, and not die?

It may be, they are taken away from *evil to come*; such times may happen as shall make us

* Epist. 64.

say,

say, *Blessed are the dead in the Lord, for they are at rest*: when we shall interpret God's meaning in their removal by those words, *Come my people, enter into your chambers and hide yourselves, till the indignation be over-past*, Isa. xxvi. 20. However, let there be never so great prosperity in view, they are gainers by the change in the best times; and the day of *their death*, is better than the day of *their birth*, for they have left a good name for piety and virtue, which is *better than precious ointment*, Eccl. vii. 1. or more fragrant than those *beds of spices and perfumes*, in which persons of eminent worth were laid at their death, or those aromatick ointments, with which they were embalmed, 2 Chron. xvi. 14. To which, it is like, Solomon alludes, in that expression, intimating that he dies with most honour, whose memory is embalmed with the *savory fruits of a virtuous life*.

All this is most true, when we can say of our deceased friends, that *they are gone to the Father*, and this on solid grounds. When we have known them by divine grace powerfully biassed toward God, holiness, and heaven, as the great centre of all their desires and aims: when we have seen them shine with the Redeemer's image in great meekness and humility, great inoffensiveness, and tender goodness towards all; (for let me tell you by the way, this sweet and quiet temper does not endear us to men only, but to God; *It is of great price*, says the apostle, *in the sight of God*, 1 Pet. iii. 4. so that when God comes to value a person, he makes high account of this meek and peaceable

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spirit,

spirit, as being the great ornament of our profession; of which the whole family and others feel the comfortable charms :) when we have found them possessed and governed with a conscientious dread of offending God or man, (perhaps in some instances too scrupulous) diligent also in the daily duties of secret piety and devotion, with reverence and great seriousness: when we have seen them faithful in all their relative capacities, as therein serving the Lord, as well as men: when they have been eminently mortified to this vain world, to all the gaiety and bravery, the interest, divertisements, and pleasures of this life; and that in years and circumstances very capable of such temptations; and this because they rather chose *the better part*, which shall never be taken away: when we have beheld their submissive patience, and Christian resignation to God, under misery; and after all, great humility in an abasing sense of their unworthiness, and need of mercy; but yet supporting their faith with honourable thoughts of the divine goodness, and a sense of their own sincerity; so as with hope and strong desires to breathe out their departing souls into their Redeemer's hands; welcoming his approaches with, *Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly*. When we can thus describe our friends, (and I know very well whom I could thus imperfectly describe) why should we not conclude *they are gone to the Father*? And why should we not rejoice in all the comforts of that consideration? How unreasonable is our immoderate sorrow, when all the rest of their friends rejoice?

joice? For, as themselves rejoice *to go to the Father*, so the blessed God their Father has welcomed them with joy to their everlasting home: Jesus Christ has presented them as his crown and joy, without spot or blemish; holy angels and spirits congratulate their arrival to their society, and cannot be supposed to rejoice less at the consummation of their victorious warfare, than at its beginning in their conversion; and shall we alone be swallowed up in sorrow? Rather let us comfort one another with these words, and ascend after them in holy desires to be in the same state and place.

For I must add, that we can never receive the comfort of this argument, unless ourselves be in earnest bent towards the same heaven, and can truly hope to meet our friends there. All who part here, do not meet again in heaven; and though they who are departed may be happy, yet if we never see them again, we lose the comfort of such a thought. If we must be separated from them by a dreadful unpassable gulph; if of us and our friends, us and our yoke-fellows, us and our children, it be found true here, that *one is to be taken, and the other left*; they admitted and we shut out from heaven: this will make their death to be the beginning of an everlasting separation, never to be healed; only it may be prevented by our serious preparation for the same happy end and state.

Now the account given of that state, (here described by *going to the Father*) sufficiently points out to us, what that requisite preparation is. Since it is to dwell and converse with God

as our Father, how necessary is it to such an end, that we here *love and serve him* as our Father with all filial respects? that we bear a lively conformity to his holy nature in our correspondent wills and affections? that we walk and converse with him? that we relish the thoughts of him? and that by frequent approaches to him in acts of holy devotion we may begin the acquaintance which heaven is to perfect? Then may we speak freely of meeting them again, when ourselves are by faith and patience *following them, who are now inheriting the promises.*

4. Finally, Let this excite near relations so to live together, as to afford this ground of consolation to their surviving friends at their own death. Though at present I may seem to have been speaking what concerns myself only, yet it concerns you to hearken for the time to come, when the like case may be yours. How surely will death dissolve all your relations, and part you and your beloved friends? The time is coming, when the now desire of your eyes shall become the terror of them; when with great anguish of soul you shall see all your mutual endearing love, all your delightful and pleasant converses, ending in dying agonies and ghastly looks, and yourselves lamenting over their expiring groans and struggles. Oh! Sirs, what can comfort you then but this consideration in my text? or, what shall comfort your poor relatives whom you leave behind you but this, that they hope *you are gone to the Father?* Methinks I pity them, who sorrow without hope, who mourn for rebellious prodigals, for wicked
though

though near relations, who they fear are lost in the horrors of an endless night of darkness and misery, and that the lamp of their lives, with that of their hopes, are both gone out together.

Oh! that therefore none of you would by your negligent, carnal, irreligious lives, be such a terror to your friends, nor make such a sword to pass through their souls! When you are sick, they tremble and are in pain; and that for two lives at once, that of the body, and the more important life of the soul too. And when you shall die in that case, they will refuse to be comforted; they'll count themselves undone, through fear that you are so: whereas did they see you *working out your own salvation*, and seeking God's kingdom and righteousness in the first place; could they perceive your penitent return to God, after your long estrangement from him, and that you are for nothing so concerned, as how you may be saved; could they be confident of your pardon and acceptance with God in Christ, oh! how secure and easy would they be! When you shall be smitten with sickness, they will then go comfortably, as the sisters of Lazarus did to Christ, saying, *Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick*: and when you die, they can cheerfully resign you into his safe hands. When it will comfort their hearts to hear you say, *My heart and my flesh fail, but God is my portion for ever*: and to hear such a comfortable farewell from you, as Christ sent to his disciples, John xx. 17. *I am going; but it is to my God, and to your God; to my Father, and to your Father*. So mighty a difference is it to our friends,

friends, (much more to our own souls) in what condition we live and die.

I beseech you, therefore, to live together as the *heirs of eternal life*; provoking one another to good works, joining your prayers, and giving mutual examples of piety; that so you may fit each other for heaven, and leave a testimony in one another's bosoms, of your sincerity towards God, and your meetness for eternal glory; that so, whether husbands or wives, parents or children, brethren or sisters, die first, your surviving friends may trace you to heaven in their refreshing thoughts, and lodge you there. For *verily they will faint then, unless they can believe you are gone to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*. So that when they have laid you in the dark grave, and the curtains of the night are drawn about you, they may entertain themselves with pleasant hopes, that your souls are among the saints in light, wrapt up in the embraces of endless love and joy: that you are standing with the *Lamb upon Mount Sion above*, where all his redeemed multitudes shall shortly convene, in order to that great *marriage-day of the Lamb*; when the glorious bridegroom shall put on all his beautiful ornaments, and appear in his brightest robes, not only with his own, but with his *Father's glory*, Luke ix. 26. and then shall *they also appear with him in glory*. When heaven shall empty itself of its blessed inhabitants, who shall all come down to be spectators of this great solemnity; ambitious to adorn the triumphs of the mighty Jesus, and to augment the magnificence of his appearance.

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When the spoils of the devouring grave shall be rescued by that triumphant conqueror, and the dead start forth at the sound of his thundering voice, and mighty trumpet. When all nations, high and low, shall answer the summons to his awful tribunal, and with attentive silence wait to hear their final doom. When, *Come ye blessed, and go ye cursed*, shall send all to their eternal homes: these to everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. When death and hell, and all such frightful things, shall be cast into the *bottomless lake for ever*. Oh, most glorious hope! Oh, more glorious fight! when it shall once be, as it surely shall. When the *ransomed of the Lord shall return*, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy shall be on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Isa. xxxv. 10. Wherefore, let us again comfort one another with these words, *Amen: Even so come, Lord Jesus*.

S E R M O N XXIV.

An Acquaintance with God, the best
Support under Afflictions.

Preached before the QUEEN, OCT. 31, 1708.

By Bishop ATTERBURY.

JOB xxii. 21.

Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.

THE exceeding corruption and folly of man is in nothing more manifest than in his averfeness to entertain any friendship or familiarity with God; though he was framed for that very end, and endued with faculties fitted to attain it; though he stands, and cannot but be sensible that he stands, in the utmost want of it; though he be invited, and encouraged to it, frequently, and earnestly, by God himself; and though it be his chief honour, advantage, and happiness, as well as his duty, to comply with those invitations.

In all cases, where the body is affected with pain, or sickness, we are forward enough to

look out for remedies, to listen greedily to every one that suggests them, and upon the least hopes of success, from the reports of others, immediately to apply them. And yet, notwithstanding that we find and feel our souls disordered and restless, tossed and disquieted by various passions, distracted between contrary ends and interests, ever seeking happiness in the enjoyments of this world, and ever missing what they seek; notwithstanding that we are assured from other men's experience, and from our own inward convictions, that the only way of regulating these disorders is, to call off our minds from too close an attention to the things of sense, and to employ them often in a sweet intercourse with our Maker, the author of our being, and fountain of all our ease and happiness; yet are we strangely backward to lay hold of this safe, this only method of cure: we go on still nourishing the distemper under which we groan, and chuse rather to feel the pain, than to apply the remedy. Excellent, therefore, was the advice of Eliphaz to Job, when, in the midst of his great troubles and pressures, he thus bespoke him, *Acquaint now thyself with him,* (i. e. with God) *and be at peace:* take this opportunity of improving thy Acquaintance with God, to which he always, but now especially invites thee; make the true use of those Afflictions which his hand, mercifully severe, hath been pleased to lay upon thee; and be led by the means of them, though thou hast endeavoured to know and serve him already, to know and serve him

still better; to desire, and love him more: calm the disorders of thy mind by reflections, on his paternal goodness and tenderness; on the wisdom, and equity, and absolute rectitude of all his proceedings: comfort thyself with such thoughts at all times, but chiefly at that time, when all earthly comforts fail thee; then do thou particularly retreat to these considerations, and shelter thyself under them; —

Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.

The words, therefore, will suggest matter not unfit for our devout meditation, under the three following heads; wherein I shall consider,

I. What this Scripture-phrase of *acquainting ourselves with God* implies, and wherein the duty recommended by it particularly consists.

II. How reasonable, necessary, and desirable a duty it is, as on many other accounts, so especially on this, that it is the only true way towards attaining a perfect tranquillity and rest of mind, — *Acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace.* Which will lead me also to shew, in the

III. Place, That the most proper season for such a religious exercise of our thoughts is, when any trouble or calamity overtakes us, *acquaint thyself now with him.*

I. We are to consider, what this Scripture-phrase of *acquainting ourselves with God*, implies, and wherein the duty recommended by it particularly consists. The phrase itself occurs, I think, no where else in holy writ;

however, the true meaning of it is very obvious and easy.

We are prone by nature to engage ourselves in too close and strict an acquaintance with the things of this world, which immediately and strongly strike our senses; with the business, the pleasures, and the amusements of it; we give ourselves up too greedily to the pursuit; and immerse ourselves too deeply in the enjoyment of them; and contract at last such an intimacy and familiarity with them, as makes it difficult and irksome for us to call off our minds to a better employment, and to think intently on any thing besides them. To check and correct this ill tendency, it is requisite that we should *acquaint ourselves with God*, that we should frequently disengage our hearts from earthly pursuits, and fix them on divine things; that we should apply ourselves to study the blessed nature and perfections of God; and to procure lively and vigorous impressions of his perpetual presence with us, and inspection over us; that we should contemplate earnestly and reverently the works of nature and grace, by which he manifests himself to us; the inscrutable ways of his providence, and all the wonderful methods of his dealing with the sons of men: that we should inure ourselves to such thoughts, till they have worked up our souls into that filial awe and love of him, that humble and implicit dependence upon him, which is the root and principle of all manner of goodness; till we have made our duty, in this respect, our pleasure, and can address ourselves

selves to him, on all occasions, with readiness and delight; imparting all our wants, and expressing all our fears, and opening all our griefs to him, with that holy freedom and confidence to which the saints and true servants of God are entitled, having *received the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father!* In this sense ought we to *acquaint ourselves with God, to set him always before us, as the Scripture elsewhere speaks; to draw near to him, and to delight in approaching him.*

But this is only a general account of what our *acquaintance with God* implies: it may be useful to mention some particulars also, wherein it chiefly consists; and to say somewhat distinctly upon each of them.

In order to begin, and improve human friendships, five things are principally requisite; knowledge, access, a similitude of manners, an entire confidence, and love: and by these also the divine friendship, of which we are treating, must be cemented, and upheld.

The first step towards an *acquaintance with God*, is, a due knowledge of him: I mean not a speculative knowledge, built on abstracted reasonings about his nature and essence; such as philosophical minds often busy themselves in, without reaping from thence any advantage towards regulating their passions, or improving their manners: but I mean a practical knowledge of those attributes of his, which invite us nearly to approach him, and closely to unite ourselves to him; a thorough sense, and vital experience of his paternal care

over us, and concern for us; of his unspotted holiness, his inflexible justice, his unerring wisdom, and his diffusive goodness; a representation of him to ourselves, under those affecting characters of a Creator, and a Redeemer, an Observer, and a Pattern, a Lawgiver, and a Judge; which are aptest to incline our wills, and to raise our affections towards him, and either to awe, or allure us into a stricter performance of every branch of our duty. These, and the like moral, and relative perfections of the Deity, are most necessary, and most easy to be understood by us; upon the least reflection and inquiry we cannot miss of them; though the oftener, and more attentively we consider them, the better, and more perfectly still shall we know them.

The Acquaintance, thus begun, cannot continue, without frequent access to him; without *seeking his face continually* (as the good Psalmist's phrase is) in all the methods of spiritual address; in contemplation, and prayer; in his word, and in his ordinances; in the publick service of the sanctuary, and in the private devotions of the closet; and chiefly in the latter of these, which are, on several accounts, most useful towards promoting this holy correspondence. By these means, and in these duties, is he to be approached, and found; and, notwithstanding our infinite distance, will *draw near to them who thus draw near to him*, and shew himself to be a God that *is at hand, and not afar off*.

But

But in vain shall we approach him, unless we endeavour to be like him: a similitude of nature and manners (in such a degree as we are capable of) must tie the holy knot, and rivet the friendship between us. Whomsoever we desire to approve, we labour also to conform ourselves to; to be *not only almost, but altogether such as they are*, if it be possible; that so they, seeing themselves in us, may like us, for the sake of themselves, and go out (as it were) to meet, and embrace their own image and resemblance. Would we then be admitted into an Acquaintance with God? Let us study to resemble him; we must be *partakers of a divine nature*, in order to partake of this high privilege and alliance! *For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*

Yet farther, one essential ingredient in all true friendships, is, a firm unshaken reliance on him who is our friend. Have we such towards God? Do we entirely trust in him? Do our souls lean on him, as a child that is weaned of his mother? Do we resign ourselves, and our affairs absolutely to be disposed of by him? and think all our concerns safer in his hands, than in our own? and resolve to believe every thing to be best and fittest for us, which he sees best should befall us? Are we still under his rod, without a murmur? without despondency of mind, and without charging God foolishly? Do we unbosom all our secrets to him, and neither endeavour, nor pretend to hide any thing that passeth in the depth of our

hearts from him? Do we enquire of him for his advice and assistance in every thing? and hearken to what our Lord God shall say to us, either by the inward whispers of our consciences, or the outward ministry of his word, or the awakening calls of his providence? and give heed diligently to fulfil all the least intimations of his good pleasure, that are any ways made known to us? Then have we entered deep into, and advanced far into that holy intimacy which the text recommends: O well is it with us! Happy are we, and shall we be!

However, yet *one thing more we lack* to be perfect; love, which is the fulfilling of this law of friendship, the surest test, and most exalted improvement of it.

Let us consider, therefore, whether we do indeed *love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength*: whether our approaches to him are always sweet and refreshing; and we are uneasy, and impatient under any long discontinuance of our conversation with him; and retire into our closet from the crowd, in order to meet him whom our soul loveth, with a pleasure far exceeding theirs, who *chant to the sound of the viol, and are joyful in the strength of new wine*: whether our hearts burn within us, at the perusal of his holy word: and the relish and savour of it upon our minds be such, as that, in comparison of it, all the most exquisite human composures seem low and mean, flat and insipid to us? Whe-

Whether we have an even, and over-burning zeal for his honour and service? and are always contriving somewhat, and doing somewhat to promote his interest, without any immediate regard to our own? Whether we delight to make mention of his name, and to make our boast in his praise, even among those who fear him not, and know him not; and to render our goodness and our devotion exemplary, in proportion to the vices and the irreligion of others? Finally, Whether our love of life, and our complacency in the good things of it, slackens every day, and even our dread of death is in some measure vanquished; and we do, whilst we are contemplating the joys of another state, almost *desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ*, and groan under those earthly clogs and bars, that incumber and obstruct us in our flight towards him, and hinder our mind from exerting with freedom all its faculties and powers, on the supreme object of its desires, hopes, and endeavours? When we perceive ourselves to be, after this manner, *rooted and grounded in love*, and to abound in these genuine and blessed fruits of it; behold! then is our spirit advanced to the nearest degree of union with the great Father of spirits, of which it is capable on this side heaven; and we are, indeed, (according to what is said of faithful Abraham in holy writ) *the friends of God*.

Thus have I shewn you, what it is, to *acquaint ourselves with God*, and wherein this Acquaintance chiefly consists; to wit, in an intimate knowledge of him, a frequency of ac-
cess

cess to him, a conformity and likeness of temper and manners, an humble and implicit reliance upon him, and an ardent affection of soul towards him. I proceed now, in the

II. Place, to consider, how reasonable, desirable, and necessary a thing it is, thus to acquaint ourselves with God, as, on many other accounts, so particularly on this; that it is the only true way towards attaining a perfect tranquillity and rest of mind; *Acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace.*

Honour, profit, and pleasure, are the three great idols to which the men of this world bow; and one, or all of which is generally aimed at, in every human friendship they make: and yet, though nothing can be more honourable, profitable, or pleasing to us, than an Acquaintance with God, we stand off from it, and will not be tempted even by these motives, though appearing to us with the utmost advantage, to embrace it.

Can any thing improve, and purify, and exalt our natures more than such a conversation as this, wherein our spirits mounting on the wings of contemplation, faith and love, ascend up to the first principle, and cause of all things, see, admire, and taste his surpassing excellence, and feel the quickening power and influence of it, till we ourselves, thus *with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed* (gradually and insensibly changed) *into the same image, from glory to glory, from one degree of perfection, and likeness, to another?* What an honour is it to us, that God should

should admit us into such a blessed participation of himself? that he should give us minds capable of such an intercourse with the Supreme, Universal Mind? and shall we be capable of it without enjoying it?

In what conversation can we spend our thoughts and time more profitably, than in this? to whom can we betake ourselves, with greater expectations to succeed in our addresses? Upon whom can we rely with more security and confidence? Is he not our most munificent benefactor, our wisest counsellor, and most potent protector and friend? both able and willing to do every thing for us, that it becomes either us to ask, or him to grant. Are not the blessings both of this world, and the next in his disposal? and is not his favour and good-will the only sure title that we can plead to them? and shall we spend our time therefore in cultivating useless and perishing acquaintances here below, to the neglecting that which is of the vastest concern to us, and upon which our everlasting welfare depends? Shall we not rather say, with St. Peter, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

O! the sweet contentment, the tranquillity, and profound rest of mind that he enjoys, who is a friend of God, and to whom God (therefore) is a friend; who hath gotten loose from all meaner pursuits, and is regardless of all lower advantages, that interfere with his great design of knowing, and loving God, and being known and beloved by him; who lives as in his sight always, looks up to him in every step
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of his conduct, imitates him to the best of his power, believes him without doubt, and obeys him without reserve; desires to do nothing but what is agreeable to his will, and resolves to fear nothing beyond, or beside his displeasure: in a word, who hath resigned all his passions and appetites to him; all his faculties and powers; and given up his soul to be possessed by him, without a rival. Surely such an one hath within his breast, that divine *peace which passeth all understanding*; is inconceivable by those who are strangers to it, and inutterable even by those upon whom it rests. In vain doth the scornful voluptuary ask for an account of it, which can never be given him; for it hath no alliance with any of the pleasures of sense, in which he delights; nor hath he any ideas, by which the perception of it may be conveyed to him: it may make the prophet's challenge, and say, *To what will you liken me? and wherewithal will you compare me?* This peace is to be understood, only by being enjoyed; and such an *Acquaintance with God* as the text recommends, is the only means of enjoying it. But I hasten, in the

III. And last place, to shew, that the most proper season for such a religious exercise of our thoughts, is, when any sore trouble or calamity overtakes us, — *Acquaint thyself now with him*, said Eliphaz to Job; that is, *now*, when the wise disposer of all things hath thought fit to pour out Affliction upon thee; then that peace, or sweet calm and repose of mind, which the text mentions, is most needful for thee, and

and is always, and only to be had from the same hand that wounded thee.

At such times our soul is most tender and susceptible of religious impressions, most apt to seek God, to delight in approaching him, and conversing with him, and to relish all the pleasures and advantages of such a spiritual commerce. The kind, and chief design of God, in all his severest dispensations, is, to melt and soften our hearts to such degrees, as he finds necessary, in order to the good purposes of his grace; and so to dispose and prepare them every way, as that they may become fit mansions for his holy Spirit to dwell in; to wean us gently and gradually from our complacence in earthly things, which we are too apt to rest in, though we are sure that we must one day part with them; to convince us of the vanity of all the satisfactions which this world affords, and to turn our thoughts and expectations towards the joys of another.

We are, by nature, indigent creatures, incapable of ourselves to content and satisfy ourselves; and therefore are ever looking abroad for somewhat to supply our defects and compleat our happiness. To this end, our wills and affections run out after every seeming good here below; but return empty and unsatisfied always from the pursuit, and therefore cannot but suggest to us the thought, and possess us with the desire of some higher good, which is their only adequate object, and in which alone true joys are to be found. But we have the most feeling sense and experience of this truth, when

when the hand of God lies heavy upon us : then we plainly discern our own insufficiency and weakness, and yet see nothing about or near us, that can afford us any real relief ; and therefore we fly to him, who only can, who is rich in mercies, and mighty to save : both able and willing to stretch himself out to all our wants, and to fill our emptiness. Even they, who in their prosperity forget God, do yet remember and turn to him when adversity befalls them : they, who, whilst the course of things goes smoothly and happily on, and every passion of theirs is entertained, every wish is gratified, find no room for thoughts of this kind : but are so taken up with enjoying the blessings, as not to be at leisure to consider the great Author and Bestower of them ; even these persons do, in the day of their distress, take refuge in reflections on the benignity and goodness of God, and begin then to think of him with some kind of pleasure (though allayed with doubts and fears) when they can with pleasure think of nothing besides him. How much more shall devout and blameless souls, which have never been strangers to these considerations, retreat to them, in an evil hour, with eagerness, and rest in them with the utmost satisfaction and delight ? The Acquaintance, which they stand in need of for their support, is not now first to be made : it has been contracted long ago, and wants only to be renewed, and applied to particular exigencies and occasions. Happy, extremely happy are they, who, by the means of a virtuous temper, and a religious education,

tion, have been trained up in this Acquaintance from their very youth, that season of our age, when the friendships we enter into are most sincere and true, most passionate and tender, most firm and durable: whilst our minds were as yet untainted with false principles, and vicious customs, and had not drunk in that contagion from ill company, which indisposes us for better, had not made that *friendship with the world, which is enmity with God.* Behold, then was the day of salvation, then was the accepted time: when God most valued the offer of our hearts, and we could give them up to him most easily, and most entirely. And when once we have thus early, and thoroughly devoted ourselves to God, there are no trials of our virtue and courage so sharp, no evils so great, but that we can sustain and bear them: for *God is our hope and strength, a very present help in time of trouble:* and, therefore, we resort to him, on such occasions, with the utmost readiness and confidence, even as a son doth to a beloved and loving parent, or a friend to the friend of his bosom, *casting all our care upon him,* as knowing that *he careth for us.*

I have set God always before me (says good David) *he is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall.* And having set God always before him, what wonder is it, if he found the special advantage of such a practice in the time of his sufferings and sorrows? And, therefore, thus, in another place, professes of himself, — *When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God.*

No man had ever studied the several arts of holy living, with greater care than he, no
man

man had more diligently practised them: his delight was in the law of God; and in that did he exercise himself day and night. He took heed to his feet, and ordered all his steps aright, that he might run the way of God's commandments. And what, at last, was the great expedient he pitched upon to secure himself in a regular and uniform course of virtue? even this, — *To set God always before himself; to watch early and late; to remember him on his bed; and to think on him when he was waking.* He was the man after God's own heart; and this was the chief method by which he became so: it was this that enabled him to fulfil the publick character of a religious, just, and merciful Prince, and a father of his people; and that awed him in his retirements, when the eyes of men were far from him: it was this that gave life, and wings to his devotions; that carried him through various difficulties and temptations; that supported him under all his troubles and afflictions. — *When I am in heaviness, (said he) I will think upon God; when my heart is vexed, I will complain to him.*

He might have thought on many other things, which are usually looked upon as reliefs to afflicted minds: he might have endeavoured to raise himself by reflecting on the happy circumstances of his royal state, on his power, and wealth, and worldly splendor; on the love and reverence that was paid him by his subjects, on *his fame*, that was gone out into all lands, and on the fear of him that was fallen upon all nations; on his potent and numerous alliances, his signal successes and triumphs.

But

But he renounces all these weak and insufficient supports, and betakes himself to that, which was worth them all, and which alone could administer true comfort to him. *When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God.*

And how can the pious sons and daughters of Afflictions better employ themselves, than in looking up to him that hath bruised them, and possessing their souls in patience, under the same thought, with which this good Prince quieted his griefs, *because it is thy hand, and thou, Lord, hast done it?* What comfort and composedness of mind must it afford them, to consider, that these are the chastisements of a kind father, who means them for our good, and *doth not willingly afflict, or grieve the children of men, but even in his wrath thinketh upon mercy*; and *will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it?*

Let us imitate the pattern, which this royal sufferer hath set us: let us follow this excellent guide; by laying hold of the remedy, which he found so successful, in the day of visitation. Let us, throughout the whole course of our lives, take care to make the thoughts of God, so present, familiar, and comfortable to us here, that we may not be afraid of appearing face to face before him hereafter. Let us so inure our minds to those faint views of him, which we can attain to in this life, that we may be found worthy to be admitted into the blessed vision of him in the next, when *in his presence there will be fulness of joy, and at his right hand pleasures for evermore.*

To him, Father, Son, &c.

VOL. III.

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S E R.

S E R M O N XXV.

The Terrors of Conscience,

Preached at St. Paul's before the Lord Mayor,
May 30, 1703.

By Bishop ATTERBURY.

MATTH. XIV. 1, 2, 3.

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the same of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist, he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison, &c.

THE Wicked (says the prophet) are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. Isa. lvii. 20. That is, men of flagitious lives are subject to great uneasiness:

finest whatever calm and repose of mind they may seem for a season to enjoy, yet, anon, a quick and pungent sense of guilt (awakened by some accident) rises like a whirlwind, ruffles and disquiets them throughout, and turns up to open view, from the very bottom of their consciences, all the filth and impurity which had settled itself there. A truth, of which there is not, perhaps, in the whole book of God, a more apt and lively instance, than that which the passage I have read from the Evangelist sets before us. The crying guilt of John the Baptist's blood sat but ill, no doubt, on the conscience of Herod, from the moment of his spilling it. However, his inward anguish and remorse was stifled and kept under for a time, by the splendor and luxury in which he lived, till he *heard of the fame of Jesus*; and then his heart smote him, at the remembrance of the inhuman treatment he had given to such another just and good man; and wrung from him a confession of what he felt, by what he uttered on that occasion. *He said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist! He is risen from the dead! and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.* There could not be a wilder imagination than this, or which more betrayed the agony and confusion of thought, under which he laboured. He had often heard John the Baptist preach, and must have known that the drift of all his sermons was, to prepare the Jews for the reception of a prophet, *mightier than him, and whose shoes he was not worthy to bear.* Upon the arrival of that prophet, soon

afterwards, Herod's frightened conscience gives him no leisure to recollect what his messenger had said; but immediately suggests to him, that this was the murdered Baptist himself! Herod, as appears from history, was, though circumcised, little better than an heathen in his principles and practices; or, if sincerely a Jew, was, at most, but of the sect of the Sadducees, who *said, there was no resurrection*; Matt. xxii. 23. and yet, under the present pangs and Terrors of his guilt, he imagines, that *John was risen from the dead*, on purpose to reprove him. It was the Baptist's distinguishing character, that *he did no miracles*, Joh. x. 41. nor pretended to the power of doing them; and yet even from hence the disturbed mind of Herod concludes, that it must be he, because *mighty works did shew forth themselves in him*. And so great was his consternation and surprize, that it broke out before those, who should least have been witnesses of it: for he whispers not his guilty fears to a bosom friend, to the partner of his crime, and of his bed; but forgets his high state and character, and declares them *to his very servants*. Surely nothing can be more just and apposite than the allusion of the prophet, in respect to this wicked tetrarch; he is *like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt*. And such is every one, that sins with an high hand, against the clear light of his conscience: although he may resist the checks of it at first, yet he will be sure to feel the lashes and reproaches of it afterwards. The avenging principle

ciple within us will certainly do its duty, upon any eminent breach of ours; and make every flagrant act of wickedness, even in this life, a punishment to itself.

With this general proposition, the particular instance of the text (duly opened and considered) will furnish us: and this proposition therefore I now purpose, by God's blessing, to handle and enforce; and, in order to fix a due, lively, and lasting sense of it upon our minds, I shall, in what follows, consider Conscience, not as a mere intellectual light, or informing faculty, a dictate of the practical understanding (as the phrase of the schools is) which directs, admonishes, and influences us, in what we *are to do*; but as it acts back upon the soul, by a reflection on what we have done; and is, by that means, the source and cause of all that joy, or dejection of mind, of those internal sensations (if I may so speak) of pleasure or pain, which attend the practice of great virtues or great vices; and begin that heaven, and that hell in us here, which will be our sure and eternal portion hereafter. *The spirit* (or conscience) *of man is the candle of the Lord*, Prov. xx. 27. which not only discovers to us, by its light, wherein our duty consists; but revives also, and cheers us with its bright beams, when we do well; and, when we do ill, is as a burning flame, to scorch, and consume us.

As such, I shall consider it in my present discourse: wherein,

I. First, I shall endeavour to illustrate this plain but weighty truth, (for indeed it needs

illustration only, and not proof) by some considerations drawn from Scripture, reason, and experience.

H. Secondly, I shall account for a particular and pressing difficulty, that seems to attend the proof it. And,

III. Thirdly and lastly, I shall apply it to (the proper object of all our admonitions from the pulpit, but most especially of this) the hearts and Consciences of the hearers.

I. First, I am to illustrate this truth by some considerations drawn from Scripture, reason, and experience.

That guilt and anguish are inseparable, and that the punishment of a man's sin begins always from himself, and from his own reflections, is a truth, every where supposed, appealed to, and inculcated in Scripture. The consequence of the first sin that was ever committed in the world, is there said to have been, that our offending parents perceived their own nakedness, and fled from the presence of God: that is, a conscious shame and fear succeeded in the room of lost innocence; and the presages of their own minds, those *auguria pœnæ futuræ* (of which even the heathen moralists speak) anticipated the sentence of divine vengeance. In relation to this office of conscience it is, that the inspired writers speak of it (in terms borrowed from the awful solemnities of human judicatories) as *bearing witness* against us, as *accusing*, or *excusing*, *judging*, and *condemning* us. Rom. ii. xv. And the prophet therefore adds this woe to the other menaces,
which

which he had denounced on a disobedient and profligate people, that *their own wickedness should correct them, and their backsliding should reprove them*: Jer. ii. 19. a correction so severe and terrible, that Solomon balancing the outward afflictions of life, and bodily pains, with the inward regrets and torments of a guilty mind, pronounces the former of these to be light and tolerable in comparison of the latter: *The spirit of a man* (says he) *will sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?* Prov. xviii. 14. Isaiah describes the dismal reflections, and foreboding thoughts that harbour in such a breast, after this manner: *The sinners of Sion are afraid, fearfulness hath surprized the hypocrites: who shall dwell with devouring flames? who shall dwell with everlasting burnings?* Isa. xxxiii. 14. But no part of Scripture gives us so lively an account of this inward scene of dejection and horror, as the Psalms of penitent David: in one of them, particularly, he thus complains: *Mine iniquities are gone over my head, as an heavy burthen; they are too heavy for me. I am feeble and sore broken, I have roared, by reason of the disquietness of my heart. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me; and as for the light of mine eyes, it is also gone from me. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore: there is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin.* Psalm xxxviii.

This is the expressive language of holy writ, when it would set to us the disorders and uneasiness of a guilty self-condemning mind. And,

2. There is nothing in these representations particular to the times and persons, on which they point; nothing but what happens alike to all men in like cases; and is the genuine and necessary result of offending against the light of our Consciences. Nor is it possible indeed in the nature of the thing, that matters should be otherwise. It is the way, in which guilt doth and must always operate. For moral evil can no more be committed, than natural evil can be suffered, without anguish and disquiet: whatever doth violence to the plain dictates of our reason concerning virtue and vice, duty and sin, will as certainly discompose and afflict our thoughts, as a wound will raise a smart in the flesh that receives it. Good and evil, whether natural or moral, are but other words for pleasure and pain, delight and uneasiness: at least, though they may be distinguished in the notion, yet are they not to be separated in reality; but the one of them, wherever it is, will constantly and uniformly excite and produce the other. Pain and pleasure are the springs of all human actions, the great engines, by which the wise author of our natures governs and steers them to the purposes, for which he ordained them. By these, annexed to the perception of good and evil, he inclines us powerfully to pursue the one, and to avoid the other; to pursue natural good, and to avoid

void natural evil, by delightful or uneasy sensations, that immediately affect the body; to pursue moral good, and to avoid moral evil, by pleasing or painful impressions made on the mind. From hence it is, that we so readily chuse or refuse, do or forbear every thing that is profitable or noxious to us, and requisite to preserve or perfect our beings. And because it is an end of far greater importance, and more worthy of our all-wise Creator's care, to secure the integrity of our moral, than of our natural perfections; therefore he hath made the pleasures and pains, subservient to this purpose, more extensive and durable; so that the inward complacence we find in acting reasonably and virtuously, and the disquiet we feel from vicious choices and pursuits, is protracted beyond the acts themselves, from whence it arose; and renewed often upon our souls, by distant reflections; whereas the pleasures and pains, attending the perceptions of natural good and evil are bounded within a narrower compass, and do seldom stay long, or return with any force upon the mind, after a removal of the objects that occasioned them.

Hence then the satisfactions, or stings of Conscience severally arise: they are the sanctions, as it were, and enforcements of that eternal law of good and evil, to which we are subjected; the natural rewards and punishments originally annexed to the observance, or breach of that law by the great promulger of it; and which being thus joined and twisted together by God, can scarce by any arts, endeavours, or practices

practices of men be put asunder. The prophet therefore explains good and evil, by sweet and bitter. *Woe be to them (says he) that call evil good, and good evil! that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* Isa. v. 20. Implying, that the former of these do as naturally and sensibly affect the soul, as the latter do the palate; and leave as grateful, or displeasing a relish behind them. But,

3. There is no need of arguments, to evince this truth; the universal experience and feeling of mankind bears witness to it. For say, did ever any of you break the power of a darling lust, resist a pressing temptation, or perform any act of a conspicuous and distinguishing virtue, but that you found it soon turn to account to you? Did not your minds swell with a secret satisfaction, at the moment when you were doing it? And was not a reflection upon it afterwards always sweet and refreshing? *Health to your navel, and marrow to your bones?* Prov. iii. 8. On the contrary, did you ever indulge a criminal appetite, or allow yourself sedately in any practice which you knew to be unlawful, but that you felt an inward struggle, and strong reluctances of mind before the attempt, and bitter pangs of remorse attending it? Though no eye saw what you did, and you were sure that no mortal could discover it; did not shame and confusion secretly lay hold of you? Was not your own conscience instead of a thousand witnesses to you? Did it not *plead with you face to face*, Ezek. xx. 35. as it were, and upbraid you with your backslidings? Have

not some of you, perhaps, at this instant, a sensible experience of the truth which I am pressing upon you? Do you not feel the operation of that powerful principle, of which I am discoursing? Is not the memory of some of your past sins even now present to you? And are not your minds stung with some degree of that regret and uneasiness, which followed upon the first commission of them? And do you not discover what passes within you, by a more than ordinary attention, seriousness, and silence; and even by an endeavour to throw off these visible marks of concern, into which you are surprized, as soon as they are observed?

The jolly and voluptuous livers, the men who set up for freedom of thought, and for disengaging themselves from the prejudices of education and superstitious opinions, may pretend to dispute this truth, and perhaps, in the gaiety of their hearts, may venture even to deride it: but they cannot, however, get rid of their inward convictions of it; they must feel it sometimes, though they will not own it. There is no possibility of reasoning ourselves out of our own experience, or of laughing down a principle woven so closely into the make and frame of our natures. Notwithstanding our endeavours to conceal and stifle it, it will break out sometimes, and discover itself to a careful observer, through all our pretences and disguises; for even *in the midst of such a laughter the heart is sorrowful*: Prov. xiii. 14. and as the beginning of that mirth was folly, so the end of it is always heaviness.

Look

Look upon one of these men who would be thought to have made his ill practices and ill principles perfectly consistent; to have shaken off all regard to the dictates of his own mind concerning good and evil, and to have gotten above the reproofs of his Conscience; and you will find a thousand things, in his actions and discourses, testifying against him, that *he deceiveth himself*, and that *the truth is not in him*. John i. 8. If he be indeed, as he pretends, at ease in his enjoyments, from whence come those disorders and unevenness in his life and conduct; whose vicissitudes of good and bad humour, mirth and thoughtfulness; that perpetual pursuit of little, mean, insipid amusements; that restless desire of changing the scene, and the objects of his pleasures; those sudden eruptions of passion and rage upon the least disappointments? Certainly, all is not right within; or else there would be a greater calm, and serenity without. If his mind were not in an unnatural situation, and under contrary influences, it would not be thus tossed and disquieted. For what reason doth he contrive for himself such a chain and succession of entertainments; and take care to be delivered over from one folly, one diversion, to another, without intermission? Why, but because he dreads to leave any void spaces of life unfilled, lest Conscience should find work for his mind at those intervals? He hath no way to fence against guilty reflections, but by stopping up all the avenues at which they might enter. Hence, his strong addiction to company, his
aver-

aversion to darkness and solitude; which recollect the thoughts, and turn the mind inward upon itself, by shutting out external objects and impressions. It is not, because the pleasures of society are always new and grateful to him, that he pursues them thus keenly; for they soon lose their relish, and grow flat and insipid, by repetition. They are not his choice, but his refuge; for the truth is, he dares not long converse with himself, and with his own thoughts; and the worst company in the world is better to him, than that of a reproving Conscience.

A lively and late proof of this we had in a certain writer, who set up for delivering men from these vain fantastick terrors; and was, on that account, for a season much read and applauded. But it is plain, that he could not work that effect in himself, which he pretended to work in others: for his books manifestly shew, that his mind was over-run with gloomy and terrible ideas of dominion and power; and that he wrote in a perpetual fright against those very principles, which he pretended to contradict and deride: and such as knew his conversation well, have assured us, that nothing was so dreadful to him, as to be in the dark, and to give his natural fears an opportunity of recoiling upon him. That he was timorous to an excess, is certain; he himself owns it in the account which he wrote of himself, and which is in every one's hands: but he did not care to own the true reason of it, and therefore lays it upon a mighty fright, which seized his mother, when

when the Spaniards attempted their famous invasion, in the year 1588, the year in which he was born. The more probable account of it is, that it naturally sprung from his own conduct and method of thinking. He had been endeavouring all his life time, to get rid of those religious principles, under which he was carefully educated by his father (a divine of the church of England) and to set up for a new system and sect, which was to be built upon the ruins of all those truths, that were then, and had ever been held sacred by the best and wisest of men. It was vanity pushed him on to this attempt, but he could not compass it. He was able, here and there, to delude a superficial thinker with his new terms and reasonings: but the hardest task of all was, thoroughly to deceive himself. His understanding could not be completely imposed upon, even by its own artifices; and his Conscience; every now and then, got the better of him in the struggle; so he lived in a perpetual suspicion and dread of the reality of those truths, which he represented as figments; and, while he made sport with that 'kingdom of darkness' (as he loved to call another world) trembled, in good earnest, at the thought of it.

Tiberius, that complete pattern of wickedness and tyranny, had taken as much pains to conquer these fears as any man, and had as many helps and advantages towards it, from great splendour and power, and a perpetual succession of new business, and new pleasures; and yet, as great a master of the art of dissimulation

mulation as he was, he could not dissemble the inward sense of his guilt, nor prevent the open eruptions of it upon very improper occasions. Witness that letter, which he wrote to the senate from his impure retreatment at *Capreae*. Tacitus has preserved the first lines of it; and there cannot be a livelier image of a mind filled with wild distraction and despair, than what they afford us: *Quid scribam vobis, P. C. aut quomodo scribam, aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, Dii me Deæque pejus perdant, quam perire quotidie sentio, si scio**! That is, "What, or how, at this time, I shall write to you, fathers of the senate, or what indeed I shall not write to you, may all the powers of heaven confound me yet worse than they have already done, if I know, or can imagine!" And his observation upon it is well worthy of ours, and very apposite to our present purpose: "In this manner (says he) was this emperor punished by a reflection on his own infamous life and guilt; nor was it in vain that the greatest master of wisdom [he means Plato] affirmed, that were the breasts of tyrants once laid open to our view, we should see there nothing but ghastly wounds and bruises; the consciousness of their own cruelty, lewdness, and ill conduct, leaving as deep and bloody prints on their minds, as the strokes of the scourge do on the back of a slave. Tiberius (adds he) confessed as much, when he uttered these words; nor could his

* Annal. lib. vi. p. 163.

" high

“ high station, or even privacy and retirement
 “ itself, hinder him from discovering to all the
 “ world the inward agonies and torments, un-
 “ der which he laboured.” Thus that excel-
 lent historian *.

Believe it, the tales of ghosts and spectres were not (as is commonly said) the mere inventions of designing men to keep weak minds in awe; nor the products only of a religious fear, degenerated into melancholy and superstition; but wicked men haunted with a sense of their own guilt (as the cruel tetrarch here in the text, with the Baptist's murder) were used to affright themselves with such phantoms as these, and often mistook strong and terrible imaginations for real apparitions. Thus, I am sure, the author of the book of Wisdom very naturally accounts for them in his 17th chapter; out of which I shall recite a large passage, very apposite to the point which we are now handling. He is there with great elegance, describing that panick fear, which seized the impious Egyptians, when (as he speaks) *they were fettered with the bonds of a long night, and shut up in their houses, the prisoners of darkness. Then, says he, they who had supposed that they lay hid in their secret sins, were horribly astonished and troubled with strange sights. For neither might the corner that held them, keep them from fear; but noises, as of waters falling down, sounded about them, and sad visions appeared unto them with heavy countenances. And they that promised*

* About this passage of Tiberius, see Hooker's excellent reflections, p. 367, 368. 7 DE61

to drive away terrors and troubles from a sick soul (the men, we may suppose, who set up for confounding the notions of good and evil, and ridiculing conscience) were sick themselves of fear worthy to be laughed at. For though no terrible thing did affright them, yet being scared by beasts that passed by, and hissing of serpents, they died for fear; refusing to look upon the air, which on no side could be avoided. For wickedness (as he concludes) condemned by its own witness, is very timorous; and, being pressed with conscience, always forcasteth grievous things!

I know it will be said, that though this be often, yet it is not always the case; since we have now and then instances of men, who lead very flagitious lives, and yet feel not any of these qualms or guirds of conscience; but do, in all appearance, live easily, and sometimes even die calmly. Which could not be (say the objectors) if the principle of conscience, and the condemning power of it were natural to man; for it would then act like other natural principles, universally, and without exception. Having hitherto therefore illustrated this truth by observations drawn from Scripture, reason, and experience; I proceed now on my

II. Second general head, To account for this difficulty, which attends the proof of it. In order to it,

1. I observe, that we are deceived often in the judgments we pass on such occasions. In our common intercourse with the world, we see only the outside and surface, as it were, of mens actions, but cannot tell how it is with

them inwardly, and at the bottom. We frame our opinions of them from what passes in conversation and public places, where they may be upon their guard, acting a part, and studying appearances. The hypocrite in perfection will put on the mask so artificially, that it shall seem to be real and natural. Decency, and a desire of esteem shall enable men to cover great passions and frailties, which nevertheless sit very close to them, and, as soon as those restraints are taken off, break out with freedom. We have read of those, who have been endued with such a constancy and firmness of temper, as even to endure the rack, and to appear composed under the pains of it, without owning their crime, or declaring their accomplices. And in like manner, the torment of a guilty conscience may sometimes be borne and dissembled. I observe,

2. That the disorders and reprehensions of conscience are not a continued, but an intermitting disease; returning upon the mind by fits, and at particular seasons only; in the intervals of which the patient shall have seeming health and real ease. The eruptions of burning mountains are not perpetual, nor doth even the smoak itself ascend always from the tops of them; but though the seeds of fire lodged in their caverns may be stifled and suppressed for a time, yet anon they gather strength, and break out again, with a rage great in proportion to its discontinuance. 'Tis by accidents and occasions chiefly that the power of this principle is called forth into act; by a sudden ill turn of fortune, or a fit

[fit of sickness; or our observation of some remarkable instance of divine vengeance, which hath overtaken other men in like cases. Even Herod was not always under the paroxysm described in the text, but surprized into it, unawares, by his bearing of the fame of Jesus; and then his heart smote him at the remembrance of the inhuman treatment he had given to such another just and good person, and filled his mind anew with forgotten horrors. We cannot therefore, from a present calm of thought, know, either how it hath been with a man heretofore, or how it shall be with him hereafter; but may easily in such cases, and do often judge wrong judgment; saying, *Peace, peace, where there is no peace*, but a truce only; and where it will appear, that there was none, whenever affliction ruffles a man's soul, or a death-bed rouzes him:

Vera tum voces pectore ab imo

Erumpunt, atque eripitur persona, manet res:

then, (and sometimes not till then) all masks and disguises are thrown off, and the mind appears naked and unguarded to itself and others. Ask those who attend the sick, and help to prepare them for their passage into another world; ask them, I say, and they will tell you, how many instances they have met with of men, who seem to have been given up to a spirit of insensibility and slumber, and have accordingly slept on for a long time, and taken their rest; and yet have in their last moments been all at once sufficiently awakened: what

inexpressible agonies and horrors they have found upon the minds of dying despairing sinners, who thought themselves secure against such attacks, and believed that the clamorous principle within them was wholly silenced; but upon the near prospect of another world, and which made no impression on them at a distance, have changed their sentiments, and dropped their false confidence; have seen their guilt, and dreaded their danger, when it was too late perhaps to think of deploring the one, or escaping the other.

After all, it must be owned, 3. That there are now and then instances of men, who have gone through even this last trial unshaken; and, after leading very dissolute lives, have yet died hard, as the phrase is, without any seeming concern for what was passed, or dread of what was to follow. Whenever such an effect happens, it is owing to one or more of these causes; either to ill principles early and deeply imbibed, or to a certain obstinacy and sullenness of temper peculiar to some men, or lastly, either to a natural or acquired stupidity. If a man begins betimes with himself, and takes pains to vitiate his mind with lewd principles, and lives long in the profession of them, he may at last root and rivet them so fast, till scarce any application whatsoever is able to loosen them, and till the natural sentiments of his conscience are even choaked and stifled by the means of them.

A false firmness and resolutions, joined with a frame of unsaying and undoing all a man hath

said

said and done before, may possibly carry him headlong on to his death, without owning, or perhaps even seeing his danger. Gross and heavy minds, unimproved by education and instruction, have at length arrived at such a degree of stupidity, as to think of nothing beyond this world, nor of any thing in it, but what immediately affects their senses. And even spirits more refined may, by a perpetual and total immersion in bodily pleasures, arrive at last at the same degree of insensibility. In such cases, and by the help of such qualities as these, it is possible, I grant, and sometimes happens, that men have gone out of the world, as they lived in it, defying conscience, and the power of it, and deriding the flames of hell, till they were in the midst of them. But these are rare instances, and of no force therefore, when opposed to the general conviction and feeling of mankind upon the same occasions: they prove only that there are monsters in the moral, as well as the natural world, which make nothing against the settled laws, and regular course of either. To argue against the innate pungent reflections of conscience from some mens want of them, is, as if one should attempt to prove, that man is not a reasonable creature, because some men are born naturals, and others by too great an intention of thought, or by brutal excesses, have lost the use of their reason. For if the light of reason may itself be extinguished, much more may the voice of conscience be drowned; which being a practical principle, is perpetually warred upon by our lusts,

and

and passions, and sinful habits; whereas, the other being a more speculative power, hath no contrary in the mind of man to struggle with.

But I forbear, since there remains yet the

III. Third and last part of my task; To apply what hath been said to the proper object of all our admonitions from the pulpit (and particularly of this) the hearts and consciences of the hearers.

Since therefore the wise Author of our natures hath so contrived them, that guilt is naturally, and almost necessarily attended with trouble and uneasiness, let us even from hence be persuaded to preserve the purity, that we may preserve the peace and tranquillity of our minds. For pleasure's sake, let us abstain from all criminal pleasures and pollutions; because the racking pains of guilt, duly awakened, are really an overbalance to the greatest sensual gratifications. The charms of vice (how tempting soever they may seem to be) are by no means equivalent to the inward remorse and trouble, and the tormenting reflections which attend it; which always keep pace with our guilt, and are proportioned to the greatness and daringness of our crimes: for *mighty sinners* (here as well as hereafter) *shall be mightily tormented*, Wild. vi. 6. Sins of omission, infirmity, and surprize there will be; even the just man falls *seven times a day* by them, and rises again from them with strength and chearfulness to his duty; but let us be sure carefully to guard against all such flagrant enormities, as do violence to the first and plainest dictates of our reason; and overbear

bear the strongest impulses of our conscience; for these will certainly leave a wound behind them, which we shall find it hard to bear, and harder, much harder to cure. Let no temptation, no interest, no influence whatsoever sway us to do any thing contrary to the suggestions of conscience in plain cases, and points of moment; let us no more dare to do in private what that tells us ought not to be done, than if we were upon an open theatre, and the eyes of the whole creation were upon us. What signifies it that we escape the view and observation of men, when the watchful witness within sees and records all our faults, and will certainly one day reprove us, and set our misdeeds in order before us.

It hath been reckoned a good rule for an happy conduct of life, to be sure of keeping our domestick concerns right, and of being easy under our own roof, where we may find an agreeable retreat and shelter from any disappointments we meet with in the great scene of vexation, the world. And the same rule will, with greater reason, hold in relation to the peace of our consciences. Let our first care be to keep all quiet and serene there: when this point is once gained at home, external accidents will not be able deeply to affect us; and unless it be gained, all the pleasures, the abundance and pomp of life will be insipid and tasteless to us.

Wherefore let us resolve all of us to stick to that principle, which will keep us easy when we are alone, and will stick to us in an hour when

when all outward comforts fail us. Let those of us particularly cherish it; who are in any degree placed above the rest of our neighbours by a superiority of parts, power, riches, or any other outward distinctions. Let those chiefly listen to this reprovcr, who are otherwise set in great measure above reproof: the more destitute they are of advice and correction from others, the more careful should they be to attend to the suggestions and whispers of this inward monitor and friend. Though they value not the censures passed by the vulgar on their actions, yet surely they cannot slight their own: nor do they stoop beneath themselves, when they stoop to themselves only, and to the inward dictates and persuasions of their own minds. The marks of distinction they bear, though they may enable them sometimes to sin with impunity as to men, yet will they not secure them against the lashes of an avenging conscience; which will find them out in their most secret retirements, cannot be forbid access, nor dismissed without being heard; will make their way to them as they did to Herod and Tiberius, through business or pleasure, nay even through guards and crowds; and all the vain forms and ceremonies, with which they may be surrounded.

In a word; let us *keep innocency, and do the thing which is right*; for, whatever other expedients towards happiness men may take up with, yet *that, and that only, will bring us peace at the last*. Psal. xxxvii. 37.

The END of the THIRD VOLUME.

